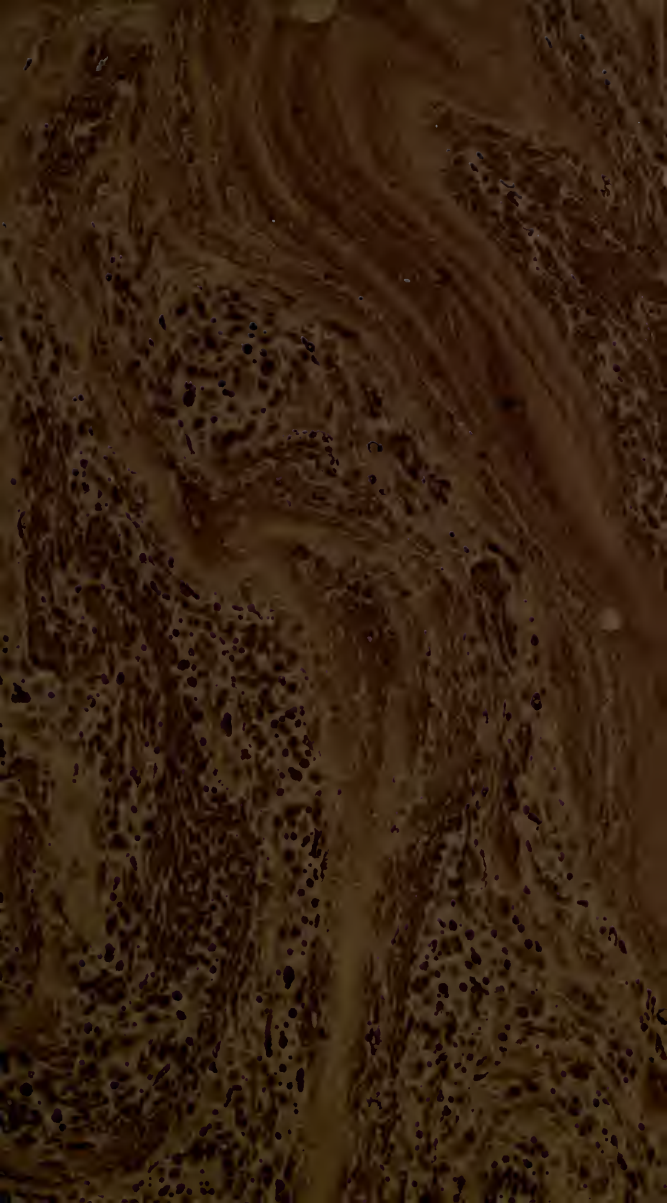

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MUSICAL

REMINISCENCES.

MUSICAL REMINISCENCES,

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF

THE ITALIAN OPERA IN ENGLAND,

FROM 1773.

The Fourth Edition,

CONTINUED TO THE PRESENT TIME,

AND INCLUDING

THE FESTIVAL

IN

WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

BY

THE EARL OF MOUNT EDGCUMBE.

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INTRODUCTION.

The following pages owe their origin to a correspondence on the subject of music, and on the changes it has undergone of late years; in which were necessarily introduced some details respecting the former state of our opera, and criticisms on the most celebrated performers who brought it to its highest perfection. These having raised some curiosity in the friend to whom they were addressed, I was induced to put them together in a more regular form, and to write as correct an account as my memory, naturally very retentive, could enable me to do, of all the musical events that have occurred during the long period to which my remembrance extends, and

particularly of the Italian Opera in this country. I accordingly began these Reminiscences, thereby yielding a good deal to my own inclination, as the recollections I have been obliged to call back have afforded me no small gratification, having been passionately fond of music while music was really good, and having lived in what I consider as one of its most flourishing periods. So great a change has taken place within a few years, that I can no longer receive from it any pleasure approaching to that which I used to experience. The remembrance of the past is therefore infinitely more agreeable than the enjoyment of the present, and I derive the highest gratification music can yet afford me from hearing again, or barely recalling to mind what formerly gave me such unqualified delight. But though the taste of Italian professors, as well singers as composers, is so much altered (and in my opinion altered for the

worse), many English amateurs retain like myself the love for the good old style, and for the compositions of those excellent masters which modern caprice has thrown aside as obsolete, but which must ever be considered by real judges as far superior to the fantastical and trifling frippery of the modern school. My remarks will no doubt appear very *old-fashioned*, and it is natural they should be so; but if it were possible to suppose they should be read fifty years hence, I think it very probable they would then be considered to be founded in truth and justice; as the present fanciful style seems to be such as must speedily pass away, and be replaced by one more true to nature, more resembling at least, if not quite reverting to, that simpler kind, which must invariably please all who are susceptible of feeling the genuine, unsophisticated expression of really fine music. But I am anticipating what, if it is said at all, will find a more proper place hereafter.

My principal object has been to give a regular account of the Opera from the earliest days in which I can remember it, which I am enabled to do for so long a space as fifty years: for I was carried thither even in my childhood; as I advanced in years my taste for it increased, and for the best portion of my life I was one of its most constant frequenters. For the last twenty years I have ceased to take the same interest in it, and been but an occasional—even a rare visitor of the theatre: for several seasons I have scarcely entered its doors. As the good singers disappeared, and remained unreplaced, as the style of the compositions changed, and as their execution deviated more and more from what I had been accustomed to in the *golden age* of the Opera, my curiosity diminished with my pleasure, and though both have latterly been occasionally revived, yet I never expect to hear again what I have done, or any new music, or new singers, that will make me amends for

those which are gone. Tastes are always various, generally fluctuating: mine, which was formed half a century ago, has not wavered in the slightest degree down to the present moment. According to that taste, whether it may be esteemed good or bad, I have ventured to give my opinion on music and performers, past and present, have detailed all I remember, and the first impressions I received. Those are always the most lasting, and not unfrequently the most correct; at least, on mature consideration, I still think them so.

The epistolary style, in which these Reminiscences were begun, and which has been in a great degree preserved, will account for the diffuse, digressive, and irregular manner in which they are written, and for the introduction of some anecdotes not strictly belonging to the subject, which occurred to my recollection as I proceeded; as well as for the egotism which may appear to prevail, and for the

relation of some occurrences purely personal. It is hoped however that the curious on musical subjects may find some information which may not be uninteresting; and (as I have more confidence in my memory than my judgement) those who differ with me in my opinions and criticisms may at least place reliance on the accuracy of the facts.

I trust that I have neither been unfair in my remarks on performers, nor totally wrong in my judgement on music in general. In the former it has been my object to give all praise where praise was due, and where it could not be conferred with justice to abstain as much as possible from censure by passing rapidly over those who could not otherwise have escaped it. In the latter I am well aware that I shall seem prejudiced, and that my opinion will be widely different from that of all who admire the modern style, because they never heard a better.

But if any *old* professors, or *old* amateurs, should ever read this book, I cannot but flatter myself they would agree in most of what I have said, and join in opinion with me on the merits of those performers of whom my panegyric may appear exaggerated, but who so greatly excelled those of latter days (with a few brilliant exceptions) that I cannot but remember them with delight, and speak of them with warmth.

I may perhaps be accused of presumption in entering into so much critical dissertation on the science, for which I am ill qualified, having no better ground on which to form a judgement than a tolerable ear, and long experience of hearing the best music while it was in its highest perfection. To this accusation I must plead guilty; nor was it my original intention to go so largely into such discussions. I undertook only to write *Reminiscences*, but was insensibly led

away as I proceeded, by the interest I felt in the subject. The writing of these pages when I first began them, was at least an agreeable occupation to myself, and beguiled many a hour of a long and tedious confinement, which not only temporarily prevented my going to the theatre, but has disabled me from ever being again its constant attendant, and though curiosity has taken me thither a very few times, unless some new and extraordinary performance again excites it, I may never see another opera.

MUSICAL REMINISCENCES.

SECTION I.

1773—1778.

Earliest recollections — Millico — Rauzzini — Gabrielli — Pozzi — Miss Davies — Savoi — Galli — Roncaglia — Danzi — Aguijari — Giorgi.

The first opera which I have any the slightest recollection of having seen was that of Artaserse, in the year 1773, at which time Millico was the first man.* Being then quite a child, I could not in the least judge of his

* It may be convenient to mention here, that the serious opera uniformly consisted of the following persons:—The primo uomo, soprano, prima donna, and tenor; the secondo uomo, soprano, seconda donna, and ultima parte, bass. It had rarely more characters, and chorusses were seldom introduced.

performance; but his face and figure were too remarkable not to make an impression never to be entirely effaced, being of a singularly dark complexion, ill made, and uncommonly plain in features. Of his merits I can say nothing but that his reputation was still high in Italy when I was in that country many years afterwards. He published here a collection of canzonettas, which are of a most pleasing and graceful style. These I frequently heard executed by Lady Clarges, who had been his scholar, and was one of the best amateur performers I ever knew. She sung with all the science of a professor, and with a taste the most polished and refined. If she had adopted that of her master, there can be no doubt of his having been an excellent singer. The first woman was, I believe, Grassi, afterwards married to the composer Bach: she was succeeded by Girelli.

I have a much more distinct recollection of Rauzzini, who succeeded Millico in the

season of 1774 and 1775, and remained at the opera for three years, having had frequent opportunities of hearing him after he had left the stage. When he first sung in this country, he was young and handsome, had an agreeable countenance, and was an animated actor. His voice was uncommonly sweet, and his taste good, but his powers were rather limited. He was a good musician, and composed several operas performed here subsequently. One only was brought out by himself, Piramo e Tisbe, in which he acted with a German woman named Schindlerin, a weak and moderate performer. I heard her mentioned with praise long afterwards in Germany as one of the best singers of their national stage, but did not see her. The other operas in which these two singers appeared together, were Armida and Montezuma, composed by Sacchini. In the last, I well remember Rauzzini's acting to have been very fine and effective in the dying scene.

In the second year of Rauzzini's engage-

ment, Schindlerin was succeeded by the celebrated Catterina Gabrielli, esteemed the best prima donna of her time, and famous alike for her talents and for her caprice. The latter was so great that she could not be depended upon; and it was thought she never gave herself the trouble to exert her great powers to the utmost before an English audience. Certain it is, that, whether from that or some other cause, she was less enthusiastically admired here than she had been in various parts of the continent, and her success was so moderate that she staid only for one season. I can remember seeing her once in the opera of Didone, but can say nothing of her performance; all I can recollect of it being the care with which she tucked up her great hoop as she sidled into the flames of Carthage. Another opera she acted here was La Vestale, which I likewise saw performed, but on that night Catterina *chose* to be indisposed, and to make her sister Francesca take her part; the latter was a miserable performer, whom

she carried every where to act as the seconda donna, and occasionally as her *double*.

On her departure, a young singer named Pozzi came to supply her place; but though handsome, and possessing a most brilliant clear voice (bel metallo di voce), she was at that time so unformed, both as a singer and an actress, that she totally failed in her first opera; and Miss Cecilia Davies, who had sung here before with Millico, was sent for to resume her station for the remainder of the season. After this degradation, Pozzi continued for some years in this country as the second woman, and in that line was superior to every other. On her return to Italy, she improved rapidly, and soon became one of the first singers in that country, as I shall have occasion to notice hereafter. Miss Davies, who, in Italy, was known by the name of L'Inglesina, was the first Englishwoman who had yet sustained the part of prima donna, and in that situation was second only to Gabrielli, whom she even rivalled in neatness of

execution. Her elder sister played on the harmonica, an improved kind of musical glasses; and in the last edition of Metastasio's works is a cantata, written for the one sister to sing, the other to accompany on that instrument. When I was in Italy, I found Miss Davies at Florence, unengaged, and poor. The English there subscribed for a private concert, at which both sisters performed. She afterwards came again to England, but being passée, did not succeed in obtaining an engagement.*

After Rauzzini quitted the opera, he still continued in, or returned shortly to, England, and ultimately settled at Bath, where for many years he conducted the concerts, singing himself as long as his voice permitted, and was in great reputation as a master, much respected and patronized to his death, which happened only a few years ago.

* This unfortunate woman is now (in 1834) living in London, in the extreme of old age, disease, and poverty.

During part of the time of which I have been speaking, the second man was Savoi, whose voice was of so singularly beautiful and peculiar a tone, that when I was in Italy, going by chance into a church at Sienna during high mass, I was struck with sounds so sweet, yet, as I thought, not new to my ear, that I could not help inquiring the name of the performer, and found they proceeded from Savoi.

The part of second man was frequently filled also by Signora Galli, her figure being rather large and masculine, and her voice a contralto. She had been a principal singer in Handel's oratorios, when conducted by himself. She is however only mentioned here on account of some subsequent circumstances of her life. She became the companion of the celebrated Miss Ray, and was with her when she was assassinated by Hackman. That unhappy young man, instigated by jealousy, though he knew his love to be perfectly hopeless, shot her with a pistol as she was entering

her carriage, at Covent Garden Theatre, and then fired a second at himself. Her wound was instantly mortal, but his own was slight, and he was tried and executed for the murder. Galli afterwards fell into extreme poverty, and at the age of about seventy, was induced to come forward to sing again at the oratorios. I had the curiosity to go, and heard her sing "He was despised and rejected of men" in the Messiah. Of course her voice was cracked and trembling, but it was easy to see her school was good; and it was pleasing to observe the kindness with which she was received, and listened to; and to mark the animation and delight with which she seemed to hear again the music in which she had formerly been a distinguished performer. The poor old woman had been in the habit of coming to me annually for a trifling present; and she told me on that occasion that nothing but the severest distress should have compelled her so to expose herself, which after all did not answer its end, as she was not paid

according to her agreement. She died shortly after.

To return from this digression. At the close of Rauzzini's engagement, his place was filled by Roncaglia, his inferior in every respect. His figure was good, and he was far from ill-looking; his voice sweet, and his style easy and *grazioso:* but he was languid, feeble, and insipid, and withal extremely affected. Yet he gave so much pleasure on his first appearance, in Sacchini's opera of Creso, that as he was under engagement to return to Italy the next year, he was hastily re-engaged for the next season but one, before it was known how his immediate successor would be liked. With him came Danzi as first woman. Though her name was Italian, she was a German, and had never been in Italy. She was young, well-looking, had a voice of uncommon clearness and compass, capable of the most astonishing execution, and was an excellent musician. Yet her performance was unsatisfactory, being too

much *alla Tedescha*, and more like that of an instrument than of a human voice. She soon after married Monsieur Lebrun, an eminent player on the hautbois, which confirmed her in the bravura style, as she was in the habit of singing songs with an obligato accompaniment for that instrument, in which the difficulties performed by both were quite astonishing, each seeming to vie with the other which could go highest, and execute the most rapid divisions. After performing in Erifile, also by Sacchini, and other operas, she, as well as Roncaglia, left England after one season, but like him was re-engaged for the next but one.

About this time another singer in the *wonderful* line was performing in the concerts at the Pantheon, by name Aguijari. I heard her in private, but can say only from report that her voice was one of the finest and most powerful ever heard, and her execution almost miraculous. She never performed at the opera in this country, where she staid but a short time, and was succeeded at the

Pantheon by a young, and then very inferior singer, with no recommendation but a very beautiful voice, promising future excellence. This was Giorgi, by which name she was little known, but of whom I shall have much, very much, to say hereafter, under that of Banti.

And here ends my *dark age* in operatical history: henceforth I shall speak with confidence, from the clearest and most distinct recollection.

SECTION II.

1778—1783.

Pacchierotti—Bernasconi—Return of Roncaglia and Madame Danzi Lebrun—Ansani—Maccherini—Return of Pacchierotti—Prudom—Comic Opera—Sestini—Todi—Allegranti—Viganoni.

From the period on which I am now entering I date the commencement of my decided taste for music, which (young as I was) I now began to love and to feel: for in the season of 1778 and 1779, arrived Pacchierotti, decidedly, in my opinion, the most perfect singer it ever fell to my lot to hear. I must enter into some detail respecting him.

Pacchierotti's voice was an extensive soprano, full and sweet in the highest degree; his powers of execution were great, but he had far too good taste and too good sense to make a display of them where it would have

been misapplied, confining it to one bravura song (aria di agilità) in each opera, conscious that the chief delight of singing, and his own supreme excellence, lay in touching expression, and exquisite pathos. Yet he was so thorough a musician that nothing came amiss to him; every style was to him equally easy, and he could sing, at first sight, all songs of the most opposite characters, not merely with the facility and correctness which a complete knowledge of music must give, but entering at once into the views of the composer, and giving them all the appropriate spirit and expression. Such was his genius in his embellishments and cadences, that their variety was inexhaustible. He could not sing a song twice in exactly the same way; yet never did he introduce an ornament that was not judicious, and appropriate to the composition. His shake, then considered an indispensable requisite, without which no one could be esteemed a perfect singer, was the very best that could be heard in every form in which

that grace can be executed: whether taken from above or below, between whole or semi-tones, fast or slow, it was always open, equal, and distinct, giving the greatest brilliancy to his cadences, and often introduced into his passages with the happiest effect.* As an actor, with many disadvantages of person, for he was tall and awkward in his figure, and his features were plain, he was nevertheless forcible and impressive: for he felt warmly, had excellent judgment, and was an enthusiast in his profession. His recitative was inimitably fine, so that even those who did not understand the language could not fail to comprehend, from his countenance, voice, and action, every sentiment he expressed. As a concert singer, and particularly in private society, he shone almost more than on the stage; for he sung with

* This, perhaps the most beautiful of graces, is now entirely lost in Italy: not one singer of that country so much as attempts it. From the English it still is heard, and often in great perfection.

greater spirit in a small circle of friends, and was more gratified with their applause, than in a public concert room, or crowded theatre. I was in the habit of so hearing him most frequently, and having been intimately acquainted with him for many years, am enabled to speak thus minutely of his performance. On such occasions he would give way to his fancy, and seem almost inspired: and I have often seen his auditors, even those the least musical, moved to tears while he was singing. Possessing a very large collection of music, he could give an infinite variety of songs by every master of reputation. I have more than once heard him sing a cantata of Haydn's, called Arianna a Naxos, composed for a single voice, with only a piano-forte accompaniment, and that was played by Haydn himself; it is needless to say the performance was perfect. To this detail of his merits, and peculiar qualities as a singer, I must add, that he was a worthy, good man, modest and diffident even to a fault; for it was to

an excess that at times checked his exertions, and made him dissatisfied with himself, when he had given the greatest delight to his hearers. He was unpresuming in his manners, grateful and attached to all his numerous friends and patrons.

The first appearance of Pacchierotti in this country, was in Demofoonte (a pasticcio), in which he sung four songs in different styles, by as many different composers, which showed his versatile talents to the greatest advantage, and at once established his reputation.

The first woman, who made also her first appearance in this opera, was Bernasconi, a good musician, and correct skilful singer; but her voice was not powerful, and she was past her prime: she was a good actress, with but an indifferent figure. The tenor, a German, named Ademberger, had a disagreeable nasal voice, but sung with considerable science. In this opera, Pozzi was second woman, and a young man with a good bass voice, made his début as *ultima parte*. This was

Rovedino, who passed the greatest part of his life in this country, and was employed at the opera till he quitted the stage, proving, if not a first rate, at least a useful performer, both in serious and comic operas. He died at an advanced age some years ago, leaving several children, all musical. One of his daughters, who is dead, was for a long time second woman; she married Weichsell, the brother of Mrs. Billington, and celebrated violin player, who at a subsequent period led the orchestra for many years.

In consequence of the re-engagement of the singers of the former season, Pacchierotti went away at the end of this, in the summer of 1779, but Bernasconi remained for one more, condescending (for then it was so esteemed) to take the part of first woman in the comic opera, which she performed admirably: Danzi, now become Madame Lebrun, being again the prima donna for the serious, and Roncaglia resuming his place, but with far different success from the first

time. Coming after Pacchierotti, his insipidity and poverty were more apparent, and not so well endured. To add to his *disgrazia*, Ansani, a new tenor, then made his first appearance, and quite eclipsed the *primo uomo*. This performer had a finely toned, full, and commanding voice, was a spirited actor, and in the first opera, called Ricimero, sustained the most prominent and important part. But he was unfortunately of a most peevish, quarrelsome temper; Roncaglia was saucy and conceited, and neither could brook the superiority claimed by the other. Their mutual jealousy, and the importance assumed by the tenor, soon produced an irreconcileable breach, Ansani threw up his engagement, and the season went on heavily to its close for want of him. When it was ended, Roncaglia went away.

The next season was far more brilliant, indeed one of the best I ever remember. Pacchierotti returned, Madame Lebrun retained, Ansani restored to his situation (willingly

yielding the *pas* to Pacchierotti's undisputed pre-eminence), Pozzi second woman, and Manzoletto, a very tolerable singer for second man, formed altogether a capital company, and its success was proportionable to its merit.

The three or four following seasons were not equally successful. Pacchierotti indeed remained, but Madame Lebrun went away, nor was her place ever well filled during the rest of his stay, which was prolonged to the end of the season of 1784. Her first successor was Maccherini, whose reputation was high in Italy. She was the wife of Ansani, but never couple was less harmonious; her temper was full as bad as his, and they never could agree, either on or off the stage. She not arriving in time for the beginning of the season, Prudom, a young singer engaged in lieu of Pozzi for second woman, was put temporarily into her place. At length the long expected and much praised Maccherini made her appearance, and never was expectation more com-

pletely disappointed. Her voice was a mere thread, scarcely audible in the orchestra, and her performance in every respect (like her countenance) miserable in the extreme: so that she was laid aside for ever after a few nights, and a fine opera called Giunio Bruto, in which her husband and Pacchierotti played the parts of the father and son, necessarily abandoned. Her failure was, of course, attributed to the climate, which it was said had destroyed her voice; but I heard her a few years after in Italy, when she had not in the least recovered it, so that it may be presumed it never had existed. Prudom again took the first place for the remainder of the season, and gave great pleasure by the sweetness of her voice, and her chaste good style of singing. She was too young to be a finished or scientific performer, but had she lived might have become one; unfortunately she died here at a very early age. For a time she sung at Drury Lane Theatre, where she first appeared in the Lord of the Manor. I mention this

only to record the singular circumstance that in this opera the celebrated Miss Farren, who continues to be as much respected and beloved in the high rank she now holds in society as she was admired when at the height of her professional excellence, performed a secondary part both as actress and singer. The latter character she soon abandoned, but many still remember with delight, and all must have heard of, her unrivalled talents as the first of comic actresses. When she left the stage, genteel comedy became extinct.*

To return to the opera. The next attempt to procure a first woman proved almost as unsuccessful as the last, Morigi (daughter of a buffo of that name then in England), being nearly as feeble as her predecessor. Another was tried in her stead, but all to no purpose. A third, named Lusini, had little better success in the following season, but her I never

* She has now left the stage of the world. The Countess of Derby died a few years ago, as much lamented as she was beloved.

heard, having gone abroad for two years in the summer of 1783.

The operas most admired during the seasons I have been speaking of, were the Rinaldo of Sacchini, l'Olimpiade, and Ezio, pasticcios, Quinto Fabio by Bertoni, master of the Conservatorio dei Mendicanti at Venice, l'Eroe Cinese by Rauzzini, and others which do not occur to me, or which I never heard.

Most of these were sustained by Pacchierotti's talents alone, for, as has been shown, he was in general miserably supported. Yet the managers deserved not all the blame that was thrown upon them, and were less in fault than unfortunate in the failure of so many prima donnas. The fact was, that there was at that time no very great female singer in Italy, those of former celebrity being on the decline, and only two young promising performers rising to eminence in their stead. These were Pozzi, who returned no more to England, and Giorgi Banti, as she was called after her marriage, whose name began to be

talked of, and who shortly after became so justly famous.

I must now, before I proceed farther, return back to my earliest recollections, in order to give some account of the comic opera, which hitherto I have not noticed, that the more important department might not be interrupted.*

The earliest singer I remember in that line was Sestini, who at her first coming over was handsome, sprightly, and a good actress, if great exuberance of gesticulation, activity of motion, and affected Italian *smorfie* could make her one; but her voice was gritty and sharp (something like singing through a comb), and she was nothing of a singer, except for lively comic airs. Yet she was much liked at first, and long a favourite with the mass of the

* The company for the comic opera consisted of the primo buffo, tenor, prima buffa, buffo caricato, bass, seconda buffa, and ultima parte, bass. There were also the uomo serio, and donna seria, generally the second man and woman of the serious opera.

public, though not with the *connoisseurs*. She was first woman for many years, then, in the decline of her voice, became second; sung at intervals at Covent Garden and the little theatre in the Haymarket; in short, condescended to every thing to keep herself from starving, and constantly remaining in England, died here at last in great poverty.

The first buffo with Sestini was Trebbi, a moderately good performer, who occasionally was employed also as tenor in the serious opera, when others failed, as on the defection of Ansani, and the death of a young man of great promise who sung in the time of Rauzzini.

One of the most favourite operas in which these singers performed was, La Buona Figliuola of Piccini, the music of which was charming, but it had been so much better sung before by Guadagni and Lovattini, that nothing was heard but lamentations for their loss, and comparisons to the disadvantage of the present performers. Lovattini was celebrated for the

most beautiful of tenor voices, and for his excellent acting. I never heard him, though he did not, I believe, leave England till the end of the season of 1774; but I saw in the pavement of a church at Bologna, a small square stone, inscribed with the three words, "Quì giace Lovattini." Guadagni was sister of a singer, of whom I shall have occasion to speak hereafter. The buffo *caricato* was Morigi, who then was excellent. He returned to England, and passed many years here, performing till he had lost his voice.

The Buona Figliuola was revived very many years after by Catalani; but the taste was so changed, that the old music, rather quaint and odd, it must be confessed, to modern ears, was no longer relished, and did not succeed. It was but indifferently sung, even by that great singer herself.

Paësiello's Frascatana, another opera of that time, has always had better success: the music is *de tout âge*, and has given great pleasure in many subsequent revivals by Storace,

Catalani, and other singers; and it ever must do so to all (though small is now the number) who can yet admire simple and natural melody. Such was the estimation in which this opera was held in Italy, that I have been told it was always brought forward on the failure of any new one, as sure to appease a dissatisfied audience.

When the public began to tire of Sestini, Todi was engaged in her stead, but failed to please here, though admired on the continent, and was kept only one season. A tenor named Jermoli was equally unsuccessful. Bernasconi then became first buffa for one year, with Trebbi, and Pozzi was occasionally put into first parts, particularly in Grétry's Zémire et Azor (to Italian words), with Manzoletto as first man, and Rovedino for the bass.

These moderate performers were at length succeeded by one who was enthusiastically admired in her first opera, the Viaggiatori Felici of Anfossi, by name Allegranti. She had a voice which, though thin, was extremely

sweet, of extraordinary compass upwards, and so flexible that she executed with ease very rapid divisions, and consequently indulged in a flowery style of singing, which had the merit of considerable novelty: she was also a good actress. But it was soon found that there was a great sameness in her manner and embellishments, and with more than our usual fickleness, she was less liked in every subsequent opera, and so disregarded by the end of the second season that she went away. With her had come Viganoni, who at that time made little effect, and also left the country; but after an absence of some years he returned, and for many more was first tenor both in the serious and comic opera. He will be mentioned more particularly hereafter.

These performers were replaced by others very much their inferiors, but I never heard them, as they remained only one season, during which I was abroad. The woman's name was Dorta; the tenor of no reputation; but Tasca,

a bass, was good enough to be retained for a year or two more.

I must here break off my account of the opera at home, and before I resume it, will relate the principal musical occurrences of my tour on the continent.

SECTION III.

1783—1785.

Musical occurrences in a Tour through Germany, France, and Italy—Return to England—Short notice of the Opera—Commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey.

The first place at which I made any stay was Spa, where the national and theatrical music could afford no pleasure; but it so chanced that Pacchierotti came thither also at the same time to pass a few weeks during the opera recess, and I had the gratification of hearing him sing in private almost daily, which was always a delightful treat. He gave one public concert, but it was not so well attended, nor himself as much admired as he deserved to be, which was hardly to be wondered at, considering that a great part of the

audience was French, who then could like no music but their own.

Proceeding into Germany, the first Italian opera I heard was at Brunswick, where there was a company of second-rate performers, of whom, however, the first man and woman were very tolerable. During my short stay they acted a serious and a comic opera: the former was the Giulio Sabino of Sarti, which I shall have to notice more particularly.

At Berlin there was a company of a superior description, in the constant pay of the king, but no operas were ever acted except in the carnival. The first woman of it was Todi, whom we had so lightly esteemed; but who was there spoken of with rapture. I had no opportunity of hearing her, but had that of seeing the first man, Concialini, next to whom I found myself seated at a table d'hôte. He too was often spoken of with great praise.

At Dresden there was a very good comic opera, headed by Allegranti, who remained a permanent favourite there as long as the

court could afford to keep up that spectacle: and happy would it have been for her if she had never been obliged to leave that place; for, many years after, she in an evil hour came again to England, and re-appeared in Cimarosa's Matrimonio Segreto. Never was there a more pitiable attempt: she had scarcely a thread of voice remaining, nor the power to sing a note in tune: her figure and acting were equally altered for the worse, and after a few nights she was obliged to retire, and quit the stage altogether. Of course again our climate, not her age, was blamed for the total loss of her voice; but she was at least remembered to have had one, and was looked upon only with compassion.

In passing through Prague, I heard an opera performed by singers almost below mediocrity, but the opera itself was so delightful that it could not but give pleasure. It was Le Nozze di Dorina; or, Frà due litigani il terzo gode, the chef-d'œuvre of Sarti in the buffo, as Giulio Sabino is in the serious style.

I often heard both afterwards executed in a very different manner.

At Vienna, where I passed all the winter, there was no serious opera, but a most excellent set of singers for the comic, consisting of Ademberger and Viganoni, who had been in England, Benucci and Kelly, who afterwards came thither, Mandini, an excellent buffo, and Storace, first woman, with several very good both male and female performers for the secondary parts. Storace in a few years after returned to this her native country, which she never left again. She will be frequently named, and her merits detailed, at a future period. I also there heard once more Bernasconi, who had settled in that city, not engaged at the opera; but she gave a few representations, at a theatre not usually open, of the Alceste and Ifigenia in Tauride of Gluck, both of which were subsequently performed at our opera, and of a comic opera called La Contadina in Corte, which she had acted here with success.

After spending the winter at Vienna, I went in the spring of 1784 to Venice, for the fair of the Ascension, on which occasion there is always an opera, but this year it was very moderate. Porri, the first man, was a very indifferent singer, and a German named Fischer and his wife, who were the tenor and first woman, not much better. The opera performed was Ademira, by Tarchi.

But if the theatrical performances disappointed me, I received very high gratification from attending those of the Conservatorio dei Mendicanti, where, on the evenings of Sundays and holy-days, oratorios were performed in the chapel. Not only all the vocal, but the instrumental parts were executed by women, concealed from view in a grated gallery. Their performance was perfect, and some of the voices exquisitely beautiful, in every pitch of which the female organ is capable. The oratorio I heard was that of Sampson, in Latin, the composition of Bertoni, by whose favour a party of English was admitted into the

interior, to a morning concert, when we had not only the pleasure of hearing a delightful selection of music, but the almost incredible sight of an entire orchestra of female performers. There were at this time four of these musical academies at Venice, of which that of the Mendicanti was esteemed the best, on account of the excellence of its master. The young women educated in them rarely went upon the stage when they quitted the establishment, but I have met with more than one female player on the violin who had received their instruction in them.

I must here add that in other towns of Italy, particularly at Florence and Rome, I derived great pleasure from the performance of similar sacred dramas in the chapels of the Padri del Oratorio.

In passing through Padua, I went to a grand mass in the church of St. Antonio, when, it being Whit Sunday, and of course a festival, I had the good fortune to hear a *motetto*, or anthem, sung by Guadagni, of whom I had

heard very much, as he had for a long time been a great favourite in England, which he left in the year 1771. When he sung as first man at our opera he was uncommonly handsome, and a remarkably good actor; Garrick himself having taken pains to instruct him. His voice was then a soprano of the finest description, and his performance, particularly of Orfeo, was described as having been delightful. He was now advanced in years, and sung as contralto: his voice was still full and well toned, and his style appeared to me excellent. He belonged to the choir of the church in which I heard him, where alone he ever sung, and that only on a few particular occasions. As he retained a great partiality for England, and had been much noticed by my family, he no sooner heard I was in the town than he came to call upon me, and insisted on my taking coffee at his house, where he entertained me, not with singing, which I should have liked much better, but with exhibiting fantoccini on a little stage, in which

he took great delight. I learnt lately that he died one year after I saw him.

Quitting Italy for the summer, I went to Paris, where, as there was at that time no Italian Opera, music could give me little pleasure. Though some of the lighter French pieces are pretty, the *grand opera* to all ears but French can only give *pain*. The principal singer, Madlle. Saint-Huberti, was absent, but I found her at Lyons, where I saw her perform several times. She was a fine actress, and in her singing a little less violent and extravagant than the generality of French singers, but still had too much of the national style. I heard her once more in private many years after, in England, when she was become Comtesse d'Entragues, and an émigrée. Her voice, then moderated to the room, and probably weakened by age, was far from disagreeable, and she was a very good musician. Her end was shocking. She and the Count, her husband, were both assassinated at their villa at Barnes by an Italian servant,

who immediately destroyed himself, being prompted to the deed by malice, not by the desire of plunder. She left one son, now Comte d'Entragues.

During my stay at Paris, one *Concert spirituel* took place in the old theatre of the Tuilleries, at which, for the first time, I heard Madame Mara, just then returned from England, where she had performed at the commemoration of Handel, at Westminster Abbey. Amongst other things, she sung, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," which was announced in the bills as being musique de Handel, paroles de *Milton*. The French had not the taste to like it. A full account will be given hereafter of that singer.

I re-entered Italy in the following autumn, and landing at Leghorn from Genoa, found an opera in that town, but it was very indifferent, with Porri for first man, Scovelli, a bad tenor, whom I had left in England, and a woman not worth remembering.

At Florence, the opera was no better, nor

can I recollect the name of any one of the singers except Bruni, the first man, who afterwards sung for one season in England.

In the beginning of the carnival at Rome, four or five theatres were opened, of which two were for serious operas. There I found both Roncaglia and Ansani, but now they could not clash, being at different theatres; the former at that of Argentina, with an excellent tenor, Mombelli, the latter at the Aliberti, with Porri for first man. The opera performed at the last was Giunio Bruto, which came to so untimely an end here. At that time no female was permitted to appear on the stage at Rome in any character whatever, operatic, dramatic, or dancing. In the singing parts, therefore, sopranos were employed as their substitutes, generally the youngest, and, consequently, not the best, being chosen for their looks rather than their ability. At one of the smaller theatres, however, the part of first woman in an intermezzo, performed between the acts of a comedy, was

filled by a very promising young singer, named Martini, who became in time one of the best first men, and from his birth-place, Sienna, was known by the name of Senesino: he never came to this country.

At length I had the good fortune to hear a thorough good opera at Naples, where the principal singers at the theatre of San Carlo were Pozzi, first woman, Rubinelli, first man, and David, tenor, all excellent in their respective lines; but I shall not enter on their merits here, as I shall have a future opportunity of doing so. The opera was Antigono, composed by Paësiello. At the Theatre dei Fiorentini, where comic operas were acted, the first woman was Coltellini, most justly the favourite of the Neapolitans; for she was very pretty, a most excellent actress, and though no great singer, so adapted herself to their taste by singing popular airs in their barbarous jargon, that *faceva furore*. Her dancing the national dance, the tarantella, was beautiful. The buffo who acted with her,

by name Casacciello, a man of enormous corpulence, could speak, I believe, nothing but Neapolitan patois, at least he sung nothing else. Coltellini never quitted Naples but once, on an engagement to Vienna; but neither there, nor at several places where she performed on her journey, did she meet with equal success. She was nevertheless an enchanting performer. There were two other theatres for comic operas; at the one, were Benini, as first woman, and her husband Mengozzi, whom I shall have occasion to notice at our own opera; at the other was nobody worth remembering, except Rovedino.

During Lent, when none but sacred dramas were allowed, the oratorio of Jephthah was acted at the Theatre del Fondo, and the principal parts well sustained by Benini, Mengozzi, and Rovedino, the music very good, but I forget the composer. Benini sung sweetly a most beautiful pathetic air as she was going to be sacrificed. I also heard at Naples a singer retired from the stage,

called Aprile, who had been famous in his youth.

Returning through Rome, I attended all the ceremonies of the holy week, which I need not describe, but I cannot pass over wholly in silence, the music in the Pope's chapel, though so well known. The Miserere, in particular, sung on three evenings at the office of *Le Tenebre*, has long been esteemed one of the finest of performances; but no one can imagine the effect produced by the perfect union of the finest voices, proceeding from concealed performers, in such a place, nearly in darkness, with all the imposing circumstances with which it is accompanied, but those who have heard it. Nothing can be more affecting or sublime. At that time, the first singer was Cristoferi, no longer a young man, but still possessing a beautiful voice. All the choir are *tonsurés*, and wear the ecclesiastical habit; they are not permitted to sing at any theatre, but I heard Cristoferi often in private, and at the ora-

torios before alluded to. The grand mass in St. Peter's, on Easter Sunday, is performed by the same singers, and like the music in the Sistine chapel, without any instrument whatever, not even the organ, none being ever used where the Pope is present.

The spring being the season for fairs in Italy, at which there is always an opera, I heard several in my journey northward, of which two deserve to be particularly mentioned.

The first of these was at Mantua, to which place I went for the express purpose of hearing the celebrated Marchesi, who will receive due notice and praise hereafter. The first woman was Pozzi, of whom, at parting I must observe, that although she had deservedly risen to the head of her profession, was a good singer, and had a voice of uncommon clearness and brilliancy, yet its tones were so bird-like, and there was such a want of feeling in her manner both of singing and acting, that she was on the whole a cold and uninteresting performer. The tenor was Scovelli, the second

man Manzoletto, who had been at Naples in the carnival. The opera was Arminio, by Tarchi, composed expressly for Marchesi, with whose performance I was very much pleased.

At Reggio I heard for the first time that first of singers Banti, of whom I shall speak at length when I have to give the account of her long residence in England. She was performing in Sarti's Opera of Medonte, with Porri (who so haunted me) and Ansani; but unfortunately the latter was ill, and could not sing the night I was there, so that the opera was acted *without* the part of Medonte. Banti's singing however was delightful.

This was my *bonne bouche*, and the last music I heard in Italy, the great theatres of Milan and Turin not being open when I passed through those towns. Upon the whole I was surprised at hearing so little very good in that country, and still more so at the extreme badness of much which I have passed over unnoticed. At the small towns, such as Nice, Trieste, and others, there were operas,

if indeed they deserved that name, for the singers were little better than those of the streets, and would not have been tolerated for a moment in England. But the passion for music cannot be so great in that land of song as we are apt to suppose: for on inquiring in any town if the opera was good, I was uniformly answered, Oh! sì; bellissimi *balli!* and indeed in general the dances are more thought of, and attended to in greater *silence*, than the opera itself, in which, if there is one, or at most two good performers, and as many good songs, it is quite sufficient, and the rest may be as bad as possible without giving any offence.* Yet the ballets are both long and wearisome in the extreme, absolute tragedies in pantomime (I saw Romeo and Juliet *danced*); while nothing is so delightful as a really good opera.

* I believe this is in some degree altered since the great *revolution* in operatic performances, for reasons which will be assigned when speaking of modern operas.

The accounts I received during this time of the opera in England, were extremely unfavourable; yet the Italians assured me that it possessed some of their best singers in Crescentini, Babbini, and la Ferrarese, who then composed the company. If so, they were very ill judged of and ill treated here, for Crescentini was thought so moderate a performer, and so little liked, that before the season was half over, he was superseded by Tenducci (who very many years before had sung, chiefly as second man) in Gluck's Orfeo. But the performance of an old man, who had never been very capital, and could now have scarcely any voice left, and that too in a part in which many still remembered Guadagni, was not likely to prove very attractive.* Rauzzini then reappeared in an opera of his own composing, called La Regina di Golconda, a drama in the French style, intermixed with dances, there

* I had heard Tenducci in concerts before I left England, but his voice was then cracked, and I did not like him. He sung this year in Westminster Abbey.

being an unusually numerous and fine set of dancers that year. But nothing succeeded; in spite of all efforts, the manager became a bankrupt, and the theatre was prematurely closed before the usual end of the season.

It is but justice to Crescentini to add, that when he was here he was very young, and had not attained that excellence which has since gained him the reputation of a first-rate singer. He never returned to this country.

I did not reach England till near the end of the summer of 1785, long after the opera-house had been shut up, and not in time to be present at the great musical festival which had taken place (for the second time) in Westminster Abbey. Though I did not therefore hear any of those surprising performances till the following spring, yet it may be convenient to give some account of them in this place, that I may not interrupt that of the opera when resumed.

The first performance of these concerts was in commemoration of Handel, in the prece-

ding year (1784); on which occasion they gave such universal satisfaction, particularly to their Majesties, under whose patronage they took place, that they were repeated for several years following, and always with equal success. The orchestra, in the first year, when it was the smallest, consisted of between five and six hundred performers, vocal and instrumental. The number was annually increased, till it amounted to near a thousand. Yet such was the admirable manner in which this prodigious band was conducted by Mr. Bates at the organ, and Cramer as leader, that not even the smallest ever executed music with greater precision. It was as one instrument. To facilitate the execution in both departments, the *long movement* (now in common use) was for the first time applied to the organ, which placing Mr. Bates much below and at a great distance from the instrument, while Cramer stood between it and the conductor, enabled both to see, and act in perfect concert with each other. It also put Mr. Bates

into such a position that he could see not only every instrumental performer ranged in front but all the chorus singers occupying the aisles on each side. To give force and fullness to the orchestra, larger instruments were also invented, and made expressly for this occasion; double kettle drums, bass trumpets, and trombones, and even *double* double-basses, all of which added surprisingly to the harmony, and were indeed necessary to make the bass sufficiently powerful to counterbalance so vast a band of violins. The chorusses too were performed with equal excellence, under the direction of the most able musical professors. The first singer on all these occasions, was Madame Mara, who had come to England to sing at the Pantheon concerts. All the best Italian as well as English singers were engaged. The music was confined to that of Handel, the burst of one of whose chorusses caused a general thrill, and was sublime beyond imagination. Yet from the vastness of that venerable pile,

never was the fullest piece of music in the least degree too loud even to those who were near the orchestra, while its construction was so favourable to sound, that Mara's single voice, or Cramer's single fiddle, were heard most distinctly in every part. It was remarkable that even the tuning of this immense band, generally so discordant, accompanied as it was by the full chords of a noble organ, produced a fine and harmonious effect. On the whole, it was acknowledged by all, even by foreigners, that no performance was ever heard so perfect, or so surprising. The sight too was striking and beautiful. The vast space and solemnity of the building, the king and queen, with all the royal family and their court, occupying one end, the enormous orchestra, with its magnificent organ, at the other, filling up the whole space, even to the top of the arches, and the thousands of full-dressed auditors ranged on the floor, and in galleries constructed over the side aisles, all listening in breathless silence (a silence

almost devotional, and never broken by that applause which would have misbecome the sanctity of the place), formed altogether a spectacle at once interesting and imposing.*

* Within the last few years, two performances on the same plan have taken place in York Minster, which rivalled, and it is said, almost equalled their model; but there was no Mara to head the vocal department. On the first occasion, Catalani sung, whose voice must have filled the vast space, and been heard there to great advantage. On the second, there was no female singer of great note, or of sufficient power.

SECTION IV.

1786—1792.

Madame Mara — Babbini — Rubinelli + Benini and Mengozzi + Storace—Morelli — Marchesi—Burning of the King's Theatre—Opera at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket—Concert at the Pantheon—Pacchierotti returned—Opera at the Pantheon—Performances at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket—David—Burning of the Pantheon—Opera at the Little Theatre.

I now proceed to the revival of the opera after its unfortunate interruption.

With no small difficulty arrangements were at length made for re-opening the theatre in the beginning of the year 1786; but no new performers having arrived from Italy, the company was not completed till the middle of the season, which began with Madame Mara as first woman (and for a time the sole

support of the opera) her first appearance on the stage. There being no first man, the tenor Babbini filled that part, and his own was consigned to Tasca, the bass who had played in the comic opera of the preceding year. There was a very good *second* soprano, named Bartolini, who, as well as Tasca, had sung at the commemoration. The first opera was Didone, a pasticcio, for which Mara had made a very judicious selection of songs, introducing four of very different characters, by Sacchini, Piccini, and other composers, all of which were so much and so equally admired, that two were encored every night, each of them receiving that mark of approbation in its turn. Mara's talents as a singer (for she was no actress, and had a bad person for the stage) were of the very first order. Her voice clear, sweet, distinct, was sufficiently powerful, though rather thin, and its agility and flexibility rendered her a most excellent bravura singer, in which style she was unrivalled; but she succeeded equally well in some of Handel's

most solemn and pathetic songs, though there appeared to be a want of that feeling in herself, which, nevertheless, she could communicate to her hearers. Her performance in this opera was perfect, and gave entire satisfaction. She next revived an opera of Sacchini, called Perseo, which had been produced in the time of Millico and Miss Davies, whose style of singing was much the same. In this too the first man's part was performed by Babbini, of whom, notwithstanding the favourable report I had heard of him, I cannot say much in praise. He might be a good singer, as far as knowledge of music could make him one, but he was unequal to producing much effect, from the weakness of his voice, which it seemed a painful effort to him to exert.

The late first woman Ferrarese del Bene, who had been also much extolled to me, was but a very moderate performer. She was this year degraded to *prima buffa*, but even in that subordinate line was so ineffective, that Sestini was recalled to strengthen the company.

But all in vain: the comic opera was little liked, and no more thought of after the arrival of Rubinelli in the spring.

That excellent singer (who has been named before) possessed a contralto voice of fine quality, but limited compass. It was full, round, firm, and steady in slow movements, but had little agility, nor did he attempt to do more than he could execute perfectly. His style was the true cantabile, in which few could excel him: his taste was admirable, and his science great; his figure tall and commanding, his manner and action solemn and dignified. In short, he must be reckoned, if not the first, yet of the first class of fine singers. The opera he chose for his début was Virginia by Tarchi, which was received with the highest applause.

In the following year Mara, Rubinelli, and Babbini remained for the serious opera, and several new ones were produced; Alceste by Gresnich (Metastasio's Demetrio), La Vestale by Rauzzini, Armida by Mortellari, and

in order to induce the king to visit the theatre called his own, but which he seldom frequented, the Giulio Cesare of Handel was revived, or rather a medley from his Italian works, for little of the original music was retained, and many of his most favourite songs from other operas were introduced, Verdi prati, Dove sei, Rendi sereno il ciglio, and others. This ancient music was particularly suited to Rubinelli, and was familiar to Mara, both of whom sung it incomparably well. Nothing could be finer than the delivery of the famous recitative Alma del gran Pompeo by the former. But in the inferior parts it was miserably executed, and the effect was absolutely ludicrous. It, however, answered the end proposed; The king came two or three times to hear it, and it was pretty generally liked by the public: at least it filled the house by attracting the exclusive lovers of the old style, who held cheap all other operatical performances.

While such was the flourishing state of the

serious opera, the comic underwent a total change much for the better, and began to regain popularity, especially towards the close of the season. At the beginning of it, Benini and Mengozzi, whom I have mentioned before, came to fill the first parts. The former had a voice of exquisite sweetness, and a finished taste and neatness in her manner of singing; but she had so little power, that she could not be heard to advantage in so large a theatre: her performance in a small one was perfect. Though from this want of strength she was generally confined to comic operas, yet her appearance and style seemed much more adapted to the serious, for which she had sufficient feeling and expression, as I had witnessed in her excellent performance of Jephthah's daughter; and during an indisposition of Mara she filled with great sweetness, and much more appropriate figure and manner, her part of Virginia. Indeed she had not that gaiety of countenance nor vivacity of manner requisite for a *prima buffa*. Her husband,

Mengozzi, was a good tenor, but also wanted power. This climate really disagreed with him, and injured his voice, so that he was prevented by illness from appearing in the first opera with Benini, nor did he ever quite recover all the powers he possessed. This was a very great disadvantage to her, his substitute being execrable.

Both these singers, of very considerable merit, if they had had a better opportunity of displaying it, were superseded in the spring of this year (1787) by the arrival of Storace and Morelli, who came out in Gli Schiavi per amore, a very pretty opera of Paësiello's, in which Sestini performed the second woman's part, and Morigi, who had long been the first buffo caricato, became second to Morelli. This opera was universally admired, and ran without any change to the end of the season. Morelli had a bass voice of great power, and good quality, and he was a very good actor. Having been *running footman* to Lord Cowper at Florence, he could not be a great musician.

He continued for many years in great favour, and sung occasionally at the opera till he had scarcely a tone left: but he was always received kindly, as an old and deserving servant of the public.

Storace was by birth, and parentage on her mother's side, English, but went early to Italy, and was never heard in this country till her reputation as the first buffa of her time was fully established. She had a harshness in her countenance, a clumsiness of figure, a coarseness in her voice, and a vulgarity of manner, that totally unfitted her for the serious opera, which she never attempted. But her knowledge of music was equal to any thing, and she could sing well in every style, as was proved by her performances in Westminster Abbey, where she sung with the best effect: in my opinion she rarely appeared to greater advantage, for in that space the harsh part of her voice was lost, while its power and clearness filled the whole of it. In her own particular line on the stage she was

unrivalled, being an excellent actress, as well as a masterly singer. She settled entirely in England, and after quitting the opera (to which she was frequently recalled in times of distress, when the performers engaged proved bad, as was too often the case), she engaged at Drury Lane, where the English opera was raised to an excellence not known before, by her singing, with that of Mrs. Crouch, Mrs. Bland, Kelly, and Bannister, and under the direction of her brother Stephen Storace, who composed, or rather compiled, several very pretty operas, of which the Haunted Tower, and the Siege of Belgrade, still remain favourites, and are frequently performed. Her voice being of a nature soon to crack and grow husky, on finding her powers decline she left the stage some time before her death, which took place a few years ago. It was very little known that she had been married at Vienna, to one Fisher, a doctor of music, and player on the fiddle. The ceremony was performed by a protestant German

clergyman in the chapel of the Dutch ambassador. Prince Adam Auersperg and myself led the bride to the altar, and our minister, Sir Robert Keith (whose proxy I had been) gave the wedding dinner; but the union was productive of so little happiness, that a separation soon took place, she never bore his name, and Dr. Fisher was heard of no more.

The engagements of Rubinelli and Mara having terminated, and the former left England, the season of 1788 began with comic operas only, in which Storace still took the lead. Benucci, who has been already mentioned, was the first buffo, but, notwithstanding his fine bass voice and excellent acting, was not so much admired as his talents deserved. He remained here but one season. It was not till after the carnival that the serious singers that were engaged could leave Italy. At length, in the spring, arrived the celebrated Marchesi, whose fame had long reached this country, and who had been extolled to such a degree that impatience and

expectation were raised to the highest pitch; and on the first night of his appearance the theatre was not only crowded to the utmost in every part, but on the rising of the curtain, the stage was so full of spectators that it was some time before order and silence could be obtained, and with some difficulty that Marchesi, who was to open the opera, could make his way before the audience. Marchesi was at this time a very well-looking young man, of good figure, and graceful deportment. His acting was spirited and expressive: his vocal powers were very great, his voice of extensive compass, but a little inclined to be thick. His execution was very considerable, and he was rather too fond of displaying it; nor was his cantabile singing equal to his bravura. In recitative, and scenes of energy and passion, he was incomparable, and had he been less lavish of ornaments, which were not always appropriate, and possessed a more pure and simple taste, his performance would have been faultless:

it was always striking, animated, and effective. He chose for his début Sarti's beautiful opera of Giulio Sabino, in which all the songs of the principal character, and they are many and various, are of the very finest description. But I was a little disappointed at Marchesi's execution of them, for they were all familiar to me, as I had repeatedly heard Pacchierotti sing them in private, and I missed his tender expression, particularly in the last pathetic scene, and lamented that their simplicity should be injured, as it was, by an over-flowery style. But his flowery style was absolute simplicity to what we have heard in latter days. The comparison made me like Marchesi less than I had done at Mantua, or than I did in other subsequent operas here. He was received with rapturous applause.

The first woman, Giuliani, was a very inferior performer, and had an uncertain, thin voice, not always perfectly in tune; yet she was not without merit, had a good figure for the stage, and acted well. The new tenor,

Forlivesi, was very indifferent, not near so good as his predecessor.

All these singers remained for the ensuing season, but the good comic performers were dismissed, and exchanged for a new set, all execrably bad. The dancers too this year were so insufferable, that dissatisfaction was loudly expressed every night, and the manager was at last compelled to send to Paris for more and better performers, amongst whom came the famous Mademoiselle Guimard, then near sixty years old, but still full of grace and gentility, and she had never possessed more.

The season ended disastrously; for a short time before its close the performances were stopped by the destruction of the opera-house, which was entirely burnt down, not without strong suspicion of its having been maliciously set on fire. The suspected person soon after committed suicide. The few remaining representations were given at Covent Garden after the season for plays was concluded, early in June. Thus was a second more fatal, and

longer, interruption given to the unfortunate King's Theatre, and great dismay arose lest there could be no opera at all the next winter. Arrangements however were made for carrying it on, upon a less splendid scale, at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, which being temporarily altered and fitted up with greater convenience for the purpose, was opened with serious and comic operas. The latter were again detestable (Sestini, though nominally second woman, being the best, and only tolerable performer) till Storace was called in for their support. But in the former, Marchesi was still first man, and Mara resumed her station in the room of Giuliani, so that the season was as successful as the smallness of the house would permit. The best new opera performed here was Demofoonte (called L'Usurpator innocente), but it was inferior to the former one of that name. The other operas in which Marchesi had most distinguished himself, were l'Olimpiade, Alessandro nell' Indie (under the name of La Generosità

d'Alessandro),* by Tarchi, and Il Disertore, a drama taken from the French play of Mercier.

The lovers of music, who from the small size of the theatre could not frequent the opera, had this year another resource, in the Pantheon, where there were excellent concerts, for which Pacchierotti had returned to England, so that London possessed at once the two finest singers of Italy. Once only they sung in the same room, at a private concert given by Lord Buckingham, when both exerted themselves to the utmost in friendly rivalship, and their combined efforts afforded the highest gratification. It was difficult to decide the point of *precedence* between two such great and equal performers; but both were civil and obliging men, despising the petty distinctions of which inferior performers are so tenacious, and Marchesi of his own

* These changes were made in compliment to Marchesi, who in neither opera acted the nominal hero: a usual *étiquette*.

accord yielded to his senior, Pacchierotti.* At the closing of the opera, the former left England.

The King's Theatre being rebuilt before the usual time for opening it, it was expected that the performances would recommence with splendor. But fresh and unforeseen difficulties arose, another theatre having been prepared for operas, under other managers, who had not only secured the Lord Chamberlain's licence, but even got the sanction of the King to call it *his* theatre. This was the Pantheon, in its original state the largest and most beautiful room in London, and a very model of fine architecture. It was the chef-d'œuvre of Wyatt, who himself contrived and executed its transformation, taking care not to injure any part of the building, and so concealing the columns and closing its dome, that it might be easily restored after

* That is, sung before him, and left the *last* song to Pacchierotti.

its temporary purpose was answered, it being then in contemplation to erect an entirely new and magnificent opera-house elsewhere, a project which could never be realised. Mr. Wyatt by this conversion produced one of the prettiest, and by far the most genteel and comfortable theatres I ever saw, of a moderate size and excellent shape, and admirably adapted both for seeing and hearing. Here the regular opera was successfully carried on, with two very good companies and ballets. Pacchierotti, Mara, and Lazzarini, a very pleasing singer with a sweet tenor voice, being at the head of the serious; and Casentini, a pretty woman and genteel actress, with Lazzarini, for tenor, Morelli and Cipriani principal buffos, composing the comic. This was the first time that Pacchierotti had met with a good prima donna since Madame Lebrun: his duettos with Mara were the most perfect pieces of execution I ever heard. The operas in which they performed together were Sacchini's Rinaldo and Bertoni's Quinto Fabio,

revived, and a charming new one by Sarti, called Idalide; or, La Vergine del Sole. The best comic were La Molinara, and La Locanda, both by Paësiello, and La bella Pescatrice by Guglielmi. On the whole I never enjoyed the opera so well as at this theatre.

In the meanwhile the proprietors of that in the Haymarket had engaged a number of performers without the precaution of first ascertaining whether they could have a licence for employing them. At the head of the vocal department, or rather, I should say, the *only* vocal performer, was David, whom I had heard at Naples. There were no other singers of even tolerable merit, but a numerous and good set of dancers. After these incautious preparations, it was with difficulty they at length succeeded in getting leave to open the theatre with *music* and dancing; but the permission not extending to dramatic performances, no opera could be acted. That of Pirro had been prepared, but was heard only at one dressed rehearsal *gratis*. The

subsequent performances consisted only of a vocal concert with ballets; and as there was no better female singer than poor old Sestini, and few of any sort that could be brought forward at a concert, two or three detached single songs by David were not attractive enough to carry many to the theatre, had not party run high on the occasion, its patronizers being rancorous against the Lord Chamberlain and the *Pantheonites*. David was unfortunate in having no better opportunity for the display of his great talents during his short stay in this country, where he was less known than his merits deserved, or than any other singer of equal eminence. He was undoubtedly the first tenor of his time, possessing a powerful and well-toned voice, great execution as well as knowledge of music, and an excellent style of singing. One of his last performances was in Westminster Abbey, at the last of those festivals, when the orchestra had to boast an assemblage of talent rarely met with, in Pacchierotti, Mara, David, and Storace.

A German singer, whose name I forget, had been engaged as first woman for the Haymarket, and sung in the rehearsal of Pirro: but finding no operas could be acted, she would not sing at the concerts, and went away without being heard elsewhere. She was said to be an excellent musician, and probably was a good singer of the *old* school, for she was the scholar of a very celebrated performer, Signora Mingotti, who had been a great favourite in this country above thirty years before, and was not only first singer, but manager of the opera for a considerable period. She came over to England again with her pupil, and I once or twice heard the old lady sing with a tremulous, but still strong voice, some of her most admired old songs. Her usual residence was Munich, where I had also heard her, she having invited me to her house for that purpose, out of regard to my family, who had been among the number of her friends and patrons here.

Thus ended the season of the year 1791.

In the next, the Haymarket Theatre never opened at all, and that of the Pantheon with comic operas only, by the same singers as the preceding year. But scarcely had the performances begun before that theatre also was burnt to the ground, and by this disaster not merely was a pretty opera-house lost, but one of the greatest architectural ornaments of the metropolis entirely destroyed. The proprietors of the rival theatre were very unjustly accused of being accessary to this misfortune, which, in this instance, was really occasioned only by accident. The opera again took refuge in the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, and went on with tolerable success to the end of the season.

No male singer of eminence now remaining in this country, and none having from this time appeared on our stage of equal excellence, I would here make a few general remarks on the three finest that have ever lived in my memory, and the last of their line, of any note or distinguished merit, that Italy ever produced. In comparing them together, I should

say that Rubinelli was the most simple, Marchesi the most brilliant, Pacchierotti the most touching singer. The style of the first was chaste and dignified; that of the second florid and spirited; while the third, combining all styles, and joining to exuberance of fancy the purest taste and most correct judgment, united every excellence, could by his variety please all descriptions of hearers, and give unqualified delight to every true lover of really good music.

SECTION V.

1793—1802.

King's Theatre re-opened—Mara, her departure and subsequent return—Banti—Tour in Germany.

During the theatrical recess, negotiations were opened, and at last brought to a successful termination, for putting an end to the schism which had, with no little acrimony, divided the musical world, and for adjusting the claims of the rival managers. This was effected by an union of parties, and an arrangement was made for re-opening the Haymarket theatre in the winter. But there was not time to bring over any new company of performers, and the best then in England were collected, with Mara at their head.

The only new singer was the first man, Bruni, whom I had heard at Florence. He

certainly was improved since that time, but still he was very weak and poor in comparison with his predecessors. He would indeed at times recall some of the tones and manner of Rubinelli, but was greatly inferior to him in every respect.

The tenor was Kelly, new to the opera, but not to the town, as he had sung for several years at Drury Lane. Though he was a good musician, and not a bad singer, having been long in Italy, yet he had retained, or regained, so much of the English vulgarity of manner, that he was never greatly liked at this theatre, where however he sung occasionally, for a good many seasons, and became very useful as stage manager.

The comic opera had no novelty. Casentini (now married to Borghi, second violin player of the opera) sung for a short time, but she was not in good health, and her voice was too weak for this theatre. Storace therefore, as usual, was re-engaged, and, aided by Kelly, Morelli, and Rovedino, gave

some very good opera buffas, particularly that of I Zingari in Fiera, by Paësiello, which was extremely well acted, and gave great satisfaction. Thus passed the season without any marked success or failure.

Mara was now however beginning to decline in voice and favour, as she advanced in age. When not engaged at the opera, she had continued here, singing at the Ancient Music and other concerts. For a short time she sang also at Covent Garden, where she was rather out of her place. She could not sing ill, but was not exactly suited for the *pretty Polly* of the Beggars' Opera, one of the characters she there assumed. At another time she sang at Drury Lane, or rather with the Drury Lane company, while they performed at the Opera-house during the rebuilding of their own theatre, when the original one of Garrick was pulled down, and the very large house erected which was subsequently burnt. On this occasion she performed in an English serious opera of Dido,

in which she retained only one song of her Didone, the brilliant bravura, Son Regina, of Sacchini. Mrs. Crouch performed the part of first man, and Kelly that of tenor. It did not greatly succeed, though the music was good, and well sung.*

At length she suddenly quitted the country, in no very creditable manner: for in the maturity of charms, which had never been great, she eloped from her husband, an idle drunken man, and bad player on the violoncello, and went off with the young flute-player Florio. With him she fled to the uttermost parts of Europe, and lived for several years in Russia, till, when she was almost forgotten, she re-appeared as suddenly and in as singular a manner as she had vanished. A very few years ago, an advertisement from

* This is not surprising, the serious opera being ill suited to our stage, and our language to recitative None ever succeeded but Dr. Arne's Artaxerxes, which at first was supported by some Italian singers, Tenducci being the original Arbaces.

Messrs. Knyvett announced for their concerts a most celebrated singer whom they were not yet at liberty to name. This mysterious secret was soon after explained by another announcement, that *Madame Mara's* benefit concert would take place at the King's Theatre on an evening specified, no one being at all aware of her return to England, or even of her existence. She must then have been at least seventy; but it was said that her voice had miraculously returned, and was again as fine as ever. But when she displayed these wonderfully revived powers, they proved, as might be expected, lamentably deficient, and the tones she produced were compared to those of a *penny trumpet.* Curiosity was so little excited that the concert was ill attended: but this single exhibition was sufficient to induce Messrs. Knyvett to relinquish her services, and Madame Mara was heard no more. I was not so lucky (or unlucky) as to hear these her last notes, as it was early in the winter, and I was not in

town. She returned to Russia, and was a great sufferer by the burning of Moscow. After that she lived at Mitlau, or some other town near the Baltic, where she died at a great age, not many years ago.

We are now come to an interesting period in operatical history, the arrival of Banti, whom I must ever consider as far the most delightful singer I ever heard. She had begun the world as a *cantante di piazza*, and as such, having attracted notice by her fine voice, she had been taken from her humble calling, taught, and brought out as a singer in concerts, first at Paris, and then in England, as before mentioned, at the Pantheon, under the name of Giorgi. But though she had the best masters, she was an idle scholar, and never would apply to the drudgery of her profession: but in her, genius supplied the place of science, and the most correct ear, with the most exquisite taste, enabled her to sing with more effect, more expression, and more apparent knowledge of her art, than

many much better professors. She never was a good musician, nor could sing at sight with ease; but having once learnt a song, and made herself mistress of its character, she threw into all she sung more pathos and true feeling than any of her competitors. Her natural powers were of the finest description: her voice, sweet and beautiful throughout, had not a fault in any part of its unusually extensive compass. Its lower notes, which reached below ordinary sopranos, were rich and mellow; the middle, full and powerful; and the very high, totally devoid of shrillness: the whole was even and regular, one of those rich *voci di petto*, which can alone completely please and satisfy the ear. In her youth it extended to the highest pitch, and was capable of such agility, that she practised and excelled most in the bravura style, in which she had no superior; but losing a few of her upper notes, and acquiring a taste for the cantabile, she gave herself up

almost entirely to the latter, in which she had no equal.

Her first appearance in this country was in the opera of Semiramide, or La Vendetta di Nino, by Bianchi, and all her part in it was of the most beautiful description. In addition to the songs belonging to the opera, she introduced a remarkably fine air by Guglielmi, from the oratorio of Debora, with an accompaniment for a violin obligato, originally played by Cramer, afterwards by Viotti, Salomon, and Weichsell. This song, though long and one of great exertion, was so great a favourite that it never failed of being *encored*, not only in its novelty, but in every subsequent revival. Her acting and recitative were excellent, and in the last scene, where Semiramide dies, was incomparably fine. No opera ever had greater success or a longer run than this; indeed it was one of those of which it is impossible to tire. She was but poorly supported in it; the first man, Roselli, who

was substituted for Bruni, having a feeble and very limited voice, but he was possessed of some taste, and with more power would have been a good singer. For want of a tenor, Rovedino was employed to fill that part.

In her second season, another soprano, named Neri, was tried, but he was so much worse that he could not be tolerated for more than one opera, and was immediately dismissed. After an interval, Roselli was recalled; Kelly also was engaged as tenor, until the return of Viganoni to this country.

In a subsequent season (1800), she flattered me highly by desiring to perform for her benefit an opera of my composition, which on private trial she had found to suit her voice. This was the Zenobia of Metastasio, an interesting and pathetic drama, and she gave to the music an effect which its own merits could never have produced in other hands. The first man's part, being written for a soprano, was allotted to Roselli, who rehearsed it in private; but his voice and

powers were so unequal to its execution, that it was found necessary to induce him to give it up, and it was taken by Viganoni, who did it far more justice. The part the latter was to have played, and had actually learnt, was given to Benelli, another tenor of considerable merit, with whose performance I had every reason to be satisfied. Rovedino was the bass; his daughter the second woman. Having granted the use of this opera to Banti only, I withdrew it immediately, and would not permit it to be again represented for the manager, who requested to have it. After this, Roselli sung no more, nor had we ever another soprano at the opera, till the arrival of Velluti, twenty-five years later. From this time Viganoni took the part of first man, and continued to fill that station, for which he was well qualified, both as singer and actor, during the remainder of Banti's stay, and for some seasons after. His voice was not very strong, nor of a superior tone or quality, but he was an

excellent musician, had good taste, and considerable versatility of talent, singing both in the serious and comic opera, and rendering himself generally useful. He must be considered as a performer of great merit. Little other change was made of the male performers during the many years she resided here.

Among the operas she performed, the most favourite were Gluck's Alceste, in which she very greatly excelled; three of her songs in it were generally repeated every night; the Ifigenia in Tauride of the same master; Paësiello's beautiful master piece, Elfrida; his Nina, or, La Pazza per Amore; Mitridate, by Nasolini, a young composer of great promise, but who died at an early age; Alzira, Merope, Cinna, and others composed expressly for her by Bianchi. Occasionally too she acted in little comic operas, and was particularly successful in Paësiello's intermezzo, La Serva Padrona, which she performed for her benefit with Morelli, and repeated by

command of their Majesties. Her exertions never flagged, nor did her admirers ever grow weary of her performance. I never wished for another singer; but the public in general began at length to call out for novelty, and Mrs. Billington having returned to England from her tour in Italy, and astonished with her wonderful execution all who heard her at both the play-houses, where she acted alternately, the manager of the opera engaged her for the next season, and suffered Banti to depart, which she was the more ready to do, because her health began to decline, and she was desirous of returning to her native country, where she did not long survive.

But before the close of her last season (1802), a singular and interesting performance took place. Banti prevailed on Mrs. Billington to perform with her on the night of her benefit, leaving to the latter the choice of the opera, and the principal character. Merope, by Portogallo, was fixed upon, in which Mrs. Billington acted the heroine of

the piece, and Banti took the part of Polifonte, though written for a tenor voice. The curiosity to hear these two celebrated singers together, was so great, that the theatre overflowed, and even ladies were obliged to sit on the stage, for want of other places. The performance satisfied every expectation, and the applause bestowed equally on both, was as rapturous as it was well deserved.

Having thus brought to a close my account (perhaps too long a one) of my most favourite singer, I will, before I proceed, make cursory mention of the music which I heard abroad during a short tour I made on the continent, in the summer and autumn of the year 1802.

Of course I could hear none that was good, or even *bearable*, till I reached Germany. But at Frankfort, during the fair, there was a German opera, which gave me considerable pleasure. I there saw the Achilles and the Camilla of Paër, the Axur Ré d'Ormus of Salieri, the Cosa rara of Martini, and other

lighter pieces, all well performed. The first female singer was Madame Lang, who had long enjoyed a high reputation in Germany.* She sung with science, and considerable execution, very much in Mara's style; but her voice was evidently in decay, and it was easy to see she had been better. A Mademoiselle Müller sung very agreeably in the comic operas. The first man, named Krebs, was come to Frankfort only for the fair, from Stutgard, the place of his engagement. He had a good tenor voice, and sung well. I saw him again at Stutgard, in a charming opera of Weigl, of which the Italian name is L'Amor Marinaro, and it was excellently sung and acted throughout. The first woman, Madame Gley, was a very pleasing performer in every respect; in her person (and she appeared in male attire), as a singer, and as an actress. A duetto between her and Krebs being called for a second time,

* Madame Lang was the sister-in-law of Mozart.

they repeated it to the Italian words. I endeavoured a few years ago to get this opera performed here, but could not succeed, though it was acknowledged to be likely to please. The *travestissement* of the first woman was, I believe, the chief obstacle. The compositions of Weigl, though an excellent master, are little known in England.

In passing through Manheim, I heard the Danaides of Salieri, which was moderate, both as to the music and performance.

On my way home, I made a short residence at Paris, where there was then an Italian comic opera, at which Lazzarini was first tenor, and the principal female singers Strinasacchi and Bolla. The former was the favourite, but she did not strike me as particularly good, and seemed a little *passée*. She has since passed some years in England, without singing, being now the wife of Ambrogetti, of whom I shall have to speak at a future period. Bolla had already been in this country, and will also be mentioned hereafter.

Of French music, the less that is said the better; but there were at this time at the Théâtre Feydeau two singers of great merit, Elleviou and Martin, who had very little of the national manner, and were most excellent actors. The *grand opera* was in no respect improved; that human ears can bear it is marvellous.

SECTION VI.

1803—1813.

Mrs. Billington—Grassini—Braham—Catalani—Tramezzani—Bertinotti—Pantheon Theatre re-opened with operas—Retrospective view of the Comic Opera—Morichelli—Bolla, &c.

I RETURN to the Opera, where Mrs. Billington now became sole first woman, with the same moderately good set of male performers, and opened the season of 1803 with the opera of Merope, Viganoni filling the part which Banti had performed. This justly famous singer was born of a musical family; her mother, an English woman, having been a vocal performer of some eminence in her line. When Miss Weichsell, she distinguished herself early in life as a piano-forte player, as her brother did on the violin. She also soon

gave promise of vocal excellence. When I first heard her, in 1783, she was very young and pretty, had a delightful fresh voice of very high compass, and sung with great neatness several songs composed for Allegranti, whom she closely imitated. She was still young when she first appeared at Covent Garden as Mrs. Billington. After performing at that theatre for several years, she went to Italy to improve her taste, and returned from thence a finished singer. Her voice, though sweet and flexible, was not of that full nature which formed the charm of Banti's, but was rather a *voce di testa*, and in its very high tones resembled a flute or flageolet. Its agility was very great, and every thing she sung was executed in the neatest manner, and with the utmost precision. Her knowledge of music enabled her to give great variety to her embellishments, which, as her taste was good, were always judicious.

With all these great and undisputed excellencies something yet was wanting; for she

possessed not the feeling to give touching expression, even when she sung with the utmost delicacy and consummate skill. Her face was handsome and her countenance full of good humour, but it was incapable of change, and she was no actress. I therefore missed Banti extremely during her whole first season, and did not admire her as much as the public at large, nor as I afterwards did when I became more fully acquainted with her merits, which, strange to say, I began to appreciate more highly from the very circumstance which rather lowered her favour, and she rose in my estimation from the comparison which tended rather to sink her in that of the public.

The event to which I allude was the arrival of Grassini, who was engaged for the next season to sing alternately with Mrs. Billington. This very handsome woman was in every thing the direct contrary of her rival. With a beautiful form, and a grace peculiarly her

own, she was an excellent actress, and her style of singing was exclusively the cantabile, which became heavy *à la longue*, and bordered a little on the monotonous: for her voice, which it was said had been a high soprano, was by some accident reduced to a low and confined contralto. She had entirely lost all its upper tones, and possessed little more than one octave of good natural notes; if she attempted to go higher, she produced only a shriek, quite unnatural, and almost painful to the ear. Her first appearance was in La Vergine del Sole, an opera of Mayer's, well suited to her peculiar talents; but her success was not very decisive as a singer, though her acting and her beauty could not fail of exciting high admiration. So equivocal was her reception, that when her benefit was to take place she did not dare encounter it alone, but called in Mrs. Billington to her aid, and she, ever willing to oblige, readily consented to appear with her. The opera, com-

posed for the occasion by Winter, was Il Ratto di Proserpina, in which Mrs. Billington acted Ceres, and Grassini Proserpine. And now the tide of favour suddenly turned; the performance of the latter carried all the applause, and her graceful figure, her fine expression of face, together with the sweet manner in which she sung several easy simple airs, stamped her at once the reigning favourite. Her deep tones were undoubtedly fine, and had a particularly good effect, when joined with the brilliant voice of Mrs. Billington; but though, from its great success, this opera was frequently repeated, they never sang together in any other. Grassini, having attained the summit of the ladder, kicked down the steps by which she had risen, and henceforth stood alone. Not only was she rapturously applauded in public, but she was taken up by the first society, *fêtée*, caressed, and introduced as a regular guest in most of the fashionable assemblies. Of her *private* claims to that distinction it is best to be silent,

but her manners and exterior behaviour were proper and genteel.

As I before observed, it was the comparison of these two rival performers that discovered to me the great superiority of Mrs. Billington as a musician and as a singer. But as every one has eyes, and but few musical ears, the superior beauty was the most generally admired, and no doubt the deaf would have been charmed with Grassini, while the blind must have been delighted with Mrs. Billington.

For two more years both these singers continued to perform alternately, and the only material change in the company was the introduction of Braham, at first conjointly with Viganoni, and afterwards as sole first man when the latter quitted the country. Though it seems needless to say much of so well-known a performer, yet it is impossible to pass over a singer of Braham's reputation without some remark. All must acknowledge that his voice is of the finest

quality, of great power, and, occasionally, sweetness. It is equally certain that he has great knowledge of music, and *can* sing extremely well. It is therefore the more to be regretted that he should ever do otherwise; that he should ever quit the natural register of his voice by raising it to an unpleasant falsetto, or force it by too violent exertion; that he should depart from a good style, and correct taste, which he knows and can follow as well as any man, to adopt, at times, the over-florid and frittered Italian manner; at others, to fall into the coarseness and vulgarity of the English. The fact is, that he can be two distinct singers, according to the audience before whom he performs, and that to gain applause he condescends to sing as ill at the playhouse as he has done well at the opera. His compositions have the same variety, and he can equally write a popular noisy song for the one, or its very opposite for the other. A duetto of his, introduced into the opera of Gli Orazj, sung by

himself and Grassini, had great beauty, and was in excellent taste.*

The operas in which Mrs. Billington excelled most, were La Clemenza di Scipione, composed by the celebrated Bach, and now revived for the first time since it was performed in its novelty by Miss Davies: Paësiello's Elfrida; Armida; Castore e Polluce, and others by Winter; and Mozart's Clemenza di Tito, which was the first of his operas ever acted in this country. She likewise occasionally played in comic operas, as will be noticed hereafter.

Grassini performed Gli Orazj e Curiazj, the chef-d'œuvre of Cimarosa, and her own,

* Braham has done material injury to English singing, by producing a host of imitators. What is in itself not good, but may be endured from a fine performer, becomes insufferable in bad imitation. Catalani has done less mischief, only because her powers are *unique* and her astonishing execution unattainable. Many men endeavour to rival Braham; no woman can aspire to being a Catalani.

(her acting in the last scene being most excellent), Zaira, by Winter; La Morte di Cleopatra, by Nasolini; and the Camilla of Paër.

After three years of divided reign, both retired; Mrs. Billington, though in full possession of all her powers, quitting the stage entirely, and Grassini, feeling her extreme high favour a little on the decline, wisely returning to Italy.*

The great, the far-famed Catalani supplied the place of both, and for many years reigned alone, for she would bear no rival, nor any singer sufficiently good to divide the applause. Of this celebrated performer it is well known that her voice is of a most uncommon quality, and capable of exertions almost supernatural. Her throat seems endued (as has been remarked by medical men) with a power of

* After her retirement from her profession, Mrs. Billington lived for a few years in England, and then went again to Italy, where she very soon died.

expansion and muscular motion by no means usual, and when she throws out all her voice to the utmost, it has a volume and strength that are quite surprising, while its agility in divisions, running up and down the scale in semi-tones, and its compass in jumping over two octaves at once, are equally astonishing. It were to be wished she was less lavish in the display of these wonderful powers, and sought to please more than to surprise; but her taste is vicious, her excessive love of ornament spoiling every simple air, and her greatest delight (indeed her chief merit) being in songs of a bold and spirited character, where much is left to her discretion (or indiscretion), without being confined by the accompaniment, but in which she can indulge in ad libitum passages with a luxuriance and redundancy no other singer ever possessed, or if possessing ever practised, and which she carries to a fantastical excess. She is fond of singing variations on some known simple air, and latterly has pushed this taste to the

very height of absurdity, by singing, even without words, variations composed for the fiddle. This is absolute nonsense, a lamentable misapplication of that finest of instruments, the human voice, and of the delightful faculty of song. Whenever I hear such an outrageous display of execution, either vocal or instrumental, I never fail to recollect, and cordially join in, the opinion of a late noble statesman, more famous for his wit than for love of music, who, hearing a remark on the extreme *difficulty* of some performance, observed, that he wished it was *impossible*.*

From what has been said, it may readily be conceived that Catalani has a bad choice in

* This *bon mot* has generally been given to Dr. Johnson, but I have reason to know it was said by the noble Lord alluded to, of whom a similar one is recorded confirming his distaste for music. Being asked why he did not subscribe to the Ancient Concerts, and it being urged as a reason for it that his brother the Bishop of W********** did, "Oh," replied his Lordship, "If I was as deaf as my brother, I would subscribe too."

music, and that she prefers the compositions of inferior masters, written expressly for herself, to the more regular of better composers. She found one here precisely to her taste, in Pucitta, who had been successful in two very light, but pleasing comic operas. Him she employed to compose for her several serious, to which he was unequal; all of them were very moderate, La Vestale the best. She performed however in many others; Semiramide, by Portogallo, which she chose for her début, but it was very inferior to Bianchi's; Mitridate, Elfrida, and, much to her dissatisfaction, La Clemenza di Tito, for she detested Mozart's music, which keeps the singer too much under the controul of the orchestra, and too strictly confined to time, which she is apt to violate. Yet she first introduced to our stage his Nozze di Figaro, in which she acted the part of Susanna admirably. In the Orazj she performed the first soprano's part of Curiazio, that of the first woman being filled by Ferlendis, a pretty good actress, at

that time first buffa. But she totally disregarded the general effect of an opera, and the cast of all the other characters, whatever might be the disadvantage of it to the other performers, if she was indulged in her whimsical choice of parts for herself. Thus in Didone, she caused the part of Enea to be done by Madame Dussek, who had neither voice, figure, nor action for the character; and in another opera she made Madame Dussek act the first woman's part, choosing for herself that of the first man.

Latterly she assumed also the place of first buffa, and succeeded equally well in that line. Indeed she gave me more pleasure in the comic than the serious operas, as she sung with greater simplicity and ease. In both, her acting was excellent; in the one, majestic, forcible, and expressive; in the other, natural, playful, and genteel. Her face and figure were suited to both; for she is very handsome, with a countenance peculiarly fine on the stage, and capable of great variety of

expression. Though the outline of her features is decidedly tragic (almost *Siddonian*), yet she can relax them into the most charming smile, and assume the character not merely of gaiety, but even of *niaiserie*, and of arch simplicity; so that her versatile powers fit her for every style. With all her faults therefore (and no great singer ever had so many), she must be reckoned a very fine performer, and if the natural powers with which she is so highly gifted were guided by sound taste and judgment, she might have been a perfect one.

The male performers with Catalani were for the most part of a very inferior description, and fit only for second singers. The first exception was Siboni, who sung well, but with a thick and tremulous voice: he staid however only a short time. After an interval, he was succeeded by Tramezzani, one of the most agreeable tenors I ever remember to have heard. This very good performer was introduced accidentally to our

stage, to which he proved so valuable an acquisition. Arriving here without any previous engagement during a season for which Catalani had on some dispute with the manager quitted the theatre, leaving no first rate singers of any sort, and when only comic operas could be acted, and even those with mediocrity, he was immediately brought forward in a serious one, called Sidagero, by Guglielmi, which was in fact an oratorio with a slight change of the words and names. Tramezzani's début in it was most successful, the music very beautiful, and his performance, especially as an actor, most admirable. He had a very handsome person, and was full of animation and feeling. His voice was of the sweetest quality, of that rich, touching, *cremona* tone peculiar to the Italians, and his singing, if not of the first order, or very scientific, was always pleasing, and full of expression. He continued to be a great favourite during all his stay (of several years) in this country. Two female singers came over

with him, both of whom performed in this opera, Calderini as first woman, in every way disagreeable, and soon parted with, and Bianchi, who remained as a respectable second.

Towards the close of Catalani's engagement, another first woman was brought over, to perform alternately with her. This was Bertinotti, who had a pleasing voice and a good manner of singing; but after giving satisfaction in one serious opera of Zaira, in which her songs were composed by her husband Radicati, was less successful in a second, upon which she took to the comic opera, and performed extremely well in Mozart's Così fan Tutte, which was admirably acted in every part, the other female characters being filled by Collini and Cauvini, two very pretty women, and pleasing actresses; the male by Tramezzani, Cauvini, a very respectable tenor, and Naldi, an excellent buffo. She also sung in the Flauto magico of the same composer: and Sidagero was revived, in which she per-

formed the part of the first woman far better than her predecessor.

So many performers of considerable talent could not be agreeable to Catalani, whose love of supreme power and sole admiration made their situation so unpleasant, that half the company quitted the theatre, and established themselves at the Pantheon, which had been rebuilt, and undergone a second transformation. On its restoration it was first fitted up as a concert room, with as much ingenuity to make it ugly as bad taste could invent; and it was as supremely so as it had been beautiful originally. No entertainments having succeeded in it, it was again metamorphosed into a theatre, which the seceders obtained leave to open. These consisted of Bertinotti, Collini, the two Cauvinis, Morelli (now very old), and a few others to fill up the company, among whom Miss Stephens, now become so favourite a singer, was engaged as *last* woman, being her first appearance on any stage. But as their licence was only for

intermezzos, or operas of one act, and *dancing* without *ballets d'action*, the performances were not very attractive, and soon ceased. This happened the sooner, from a report industriously circulated, and published in the newspapers with the attestation of an architect, that the external walls, though not much injured by the fire, were yet unequal to bearing the weight of the new roof which had been erected upon them, and that the building was unsafe. It was therefore so little frequented, that it soon closed, and the singers dispersed, most of them, amongst whom was Bertinotti, leaving the country. The theatre still stands, but, its reputation being thus blasted, has never been re-opened, and a house of excellent shape, and great convenience, capable of being made one of the prettiest in London, is thus lost to the public.*

Catalani was now the only performer of

* This building has just undergone another transformation, and been opened as a bazaar.

any eminence remaining in England, and led in both lines: but as one singer does not constitute an opera,* and neither her disposition would bear with others, nor the extravagance of her annually increasing demands allow the manager to engage them, she at length quitted the theatre at the end of the season of 1813, having first endeavoured to purchase it, and thereby become sole proprietor, sole manager, and sole actress.

After she left our stage she for many years never trod any other, except at Paris, where she opened a small theatre under her own management, but the undertaking was not successful. It is singular that the most famous singer and actress of her time should remain so long without any theatrical engagement; but her inordinate terms make it impossible for any manager to incur so great an expense, and

* Her husband, M. Valabregue, was of a very different opinion: he is reported to have said, "Ma femme, et quatre ou cinq poupées, voilà tout ce qu'il faut."

she has found it more agreeable to her taste, and probably more advantageous to her interest, to travel throughout nearly the whole of Europe *giving* concerts, at which she is generally the only vocal performer. She has made two such visits to England, and may in all probability make more, as she retains a partiality for this country, where she has been more extravagantly admired and paid than in any other. She has had the least success in her own, where she has sung but little, and where her talents are appreciated at their just value. As in what has been said she may have appeared in rather an unamiable light, it is but justice to add, that off the stage there is not an unamiable trait in her character. She is an excellent woman, and in every relation of private life her conduct is irreproachable.

As I consider Catalani to be the last great singer heard in this country whose name is likely to be recorded in musical annals; and as, soon after her departure, a new æra began

in our opera, I shall here pause, and after going back to notice shortly the comic opera from the time where I interrupted my account of it, shall close this long period with a few general remarks.

So frequent and rapid were the changes which took place in the comic department, that it would be as difficult as unnecessary to observe a strict regularity in the account of them. I shall therefore not attempt it, but only mention the principal singers and performances as they occur to me.

Together with Banti came Morichelli, who was cried up beforehand as her equal if not her superior. If her admirers were forced to admit that her voice was inferior to Banti's, she was, they said, a much better musician. So she might be, but never could have been half so delightful a singer, and she was now past her prime; her voice was not true, her taste spoilt by a long residence at Paris, where she adopted much of the national style, and her manner and acting were affected.

In short, she did not please generally, though there was a strong party for her (who foretold she would in time eclipse her more brilliant rival), and after her second season she went away, leaving behind her, in every print shop, her portrait, with the flattering, but false inscription, " Partì, ma vide che adorata partiva."

The best of her successors, and far better than herself, was Bolla, a very pretty woman, and pleasing genteel actress, who with a better voice would have been an excellent singer. She was very successful in the Zingari in Fiera, and in Nina, which latter opera she performed for her benefit in a novel and singular manner, the dialogue being spoken in prose without recitative, which had not a bad effect; but this way of acting it was deemed an infringement of the rights of the English theatres, and after a few nights it was stopped by authority, as unlawful at the Opera.

Such a succession of very indifferent per-

formers followed, none of whom stayed more than one season, some not so long, that I have little to add but a list of names. Among them were Vinci, a *great* woman, with great pretensions, aiming at much, and failing in every thing: Gerbini, a bad singer, without voice, but a good player on the fiddle, having been educated in a conservatorio at Venice: Perini, very near being a good singer, but not agreeable: Fabrizzi, very far from a bad one, but neither young nor pretty, therefore not liked: Angelelli, both young and pretty, but much too weak for the stage, for which she was not designed; for she was the daughter of an English gentleman resident in Italy, and well brought up; with a pretty *voce di camera*, she was a good amateur singer; her theatrical name was feigned, and she was soon after well married in Germany. Poor Allegranti's re-appearance has been mentioned; and some others, too bad to mention at all, just passed in review, and disappeared immediately. One alone who appeared thus

transiently ought to have been more admired, and retained. This was Marconi, an excellent singer and very genteel actress; but her voice was the deepest contralto of a female's I ever heard, and she did not please, though she performed in a very pretty opera, called Adolfo e Clara (from the French of that name), extremely well acted in all its parts, by Tramezzani, Naldi, and a new buffo with a good voice and considerable talent, whose name I forget, as he too was never engaged, and the opera was laid aside after a very few representations. If Marconi's voice was too low for a prima donna, she would have been of infinite use to the theatre for contralto parts, and an admirable performer of male characters in the serious opera. She staid so short a time in England as to be scarcely known.

It happening once that both the first women, serious and comic, were prevented by illness from performing (so that the theatre must have been shut), Mrs. Bland of Drury Lane was

engaged for a few nights, and performed very creditably to herself and agreeably to the audience, in the operas of La Frascatana, and Gli Schiavi per Amore.*

Storace was frequently called in, sometimes alone, at others to give additional strength to some particular opera, as in Martini's Arbore di Diana with Fabrizzi, in which also sung Viganoni, Braham, and Morelli. In another season, La Cosa Rara, by the same composer, was performed by the same singers, with the addition of Kelly, and the important substitution of Mrs. Billington for Fabrizzi. Storace likewise appeared with Naldi in his first opera. This excellent actor was a good musician, and, as far as his powers allowed, a good singer, but his voice was weak and

* Though Mrs. Bland was only a singer of the second class, few, if any, English singers who have appeared at the opera sung with such pure Italian taste, or equalled her in recitative and pronunciation of the language. Her maiden name was Romanzini, so she might have been of Italian origin.

uncertain. Soon after, Mrs. Billington performed with Naldi in the Fanatico per la Musica, in which she took the opportunity of displaying her talents as an instrumental performer by accompanying herself on the piano-forte.

Recourse was occasionally had to Mrs. Dickons, but she produced little effect on the Italian stage; her best part was the Countess in Figaro.

Ferlendis, who has been already alluded to, was I think less liked than she deserved, for she had a very good contralto voice, and was far from a bad buffa. She would have been thought, too, to have acted the part of Orazia well, had it not been for the comparison with Grassini, and for Catalani's then eclipsing every body. On Catalani's temporary secession, Collini was engaged, but soon found unequal to a first woman's part; and to her was added the wife of the composer Pucitta, whose two comic operas were then performed with considerable success.

The most favourite was La Caccia di Enrico, which Catalani herself afterwards acted, but changed and added to the music. The two above-named singers were both very good as seconds, and the former of them, having a fine contralto voice, was often employed as first man in serious operas.

At length, Catalani assumed both departments, and after her leaving the stage they were rarely separated, the whole style of operas being in a year or two materially changed, as I shall presently show.

But first I would take a short retrospective view of the two last periods, and bring into comparison with each other the five great female singers of whom I have spoken so much at length individually.

They may be divided into two classes, of which Madame Mara and Mrs. Billington form the first; and they were in most respects so similar, that the same observations will apply equally to both. Both were excellent

musicians, thoroughly skilled in their profession; both had voices of uncommon sweetness and agility, particularly suited to the bravura style, and executed to perfection, and with good taste, every thing they sung. But neither was an Italian, and consequently both were deficient in recitative: neither had much feeling or theatrical talent, and they were absolutely null as actresses; therefore they were more calculated to give pleasure in the concert-room than on the stage.

The other three, on the contrary, had great and distinguished dramatic talents, and seemed born for the theatrical profession. They were all likewise but indifferently skilled in music, supplying by genius what they wanted in science, and thereby producing the greatest and most striking effects on the stage: these are their points of resemblance. Their distinctive differences, I should say were these; Grassini was all grace, Catalani all fire, Banti all feeling; and by a singular coincidence,

forming almost exact counterparts of the three great singers before compared together, the first may be said to have borne a strong resemblance in her style to Rubinelli, the second to Marchesi, and the third to have united in a high degree all the varied excellencies of Pacchierotti.

SECTION VII.

1814—1823.

Change of style in music and modern operas—Rossini —Mozart—Short account of the opera during this period—Camporese.

The opera in England for the period of ten years after the departure of Catalani, will afford much less room for observation than any of the preceding, as far as the singers are concerned; for, with one or two exceptions, there were not any of whom I feel inclined to say much, because there is not much to be said in their praise. But so great a change has taken place in the character of the dramas, in the style of the music, and in its performance, that I cannot help enlarging a little on that subject before I proceed farther.

One of the most material alterations is,

that the grand distinction between serious and comic operas is nearly at an end, the separation of the singers for their performance entirely so. Not only do the same sing in both, but a new species of drama has arisen, a kind of mongrel between them, called *semi-seria*, which bears the same analogy to the other two that that non-descript the melo-drama does to the legitimate tragedy and comedy of the English stage. The construction of these newly-invented pieces is essentially different from the old. The dialogue, which used to be carried on in recitative, and which in Metastasio's operas is often so beautiful and interesting, is now cut up (and rendered unintelligible if it were worth listening to) into *pezzi concertati*, or long singing conversations, which present a tedious succession of unconnected, ever-changing motivos, having nothing to do with each other; and if a satisfactory air is for a moment introduced, which the ear would like to dwell upon, to hear modulated, varied, and

again returned to, it is broken off before it is well understood or sufficiently heard, by a sudden transition, into a totally different melody, time, and key, and recurs no more: so that no impression can be made, or recollection of it preserved.* Single songs are

* In the periodical paper called The Looker-on (No. 74) is the following passage, most apposite to this subject. The author, comparing the arts of painting and music, says—

"In the objects which exercise the sense of seeing, "beauty of figure may be resolved into *uniformity*, "*variety*, and *proportion*. *Uniformity*, because it pro- "duces facility of conception, and enables the whole to "enter easily into the mind; *variety*, because it gra- "tifies the appetite for novelty, and puts the mind into "action by a transition from one contemplation to "another; *proportion*, because it gratifies our moral "sense of fitness and utility. Beauty in music results "from nearly the same causes: that is, addresses itself "to the same seated principles of the mind. It is here "that a variety of the parts and tones under the same "key, that is, a *particular* variety subordinate to a "*general* uniformity, excites those pleasing sensations "which constitute a sense of beauty. In harmony,

almost exploded, for which one good reason may be given, that there are few singers capable of singing them. Even a prima donna, who would formerly have complained at having less than three or four airs allotted to her, is now satisfied with one trifling cavatina for a whole opera.

The acknowledged decline of singing in general (which the Italians themselves are obliged to confess) has no doubt in a great measure occasioned this change. But another cause has certainly contributed to it, and that is the difference of the voices of the male performers. Sopranos have long ceased to exist, but tenors for a long while filled their place. Now even these have become so

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" that variety is more complicated, but it is still *va-*
" *riety* under the controul of a certain *uniformity*, and
" submittted to strict rules of *proportion.*"

Nothing can be more just, or more clearly expressed, than this definition, or a more decided condemnation by anticipation of the modern style of music. It was written in 1793.

scarce, that Italy can produce no more than two or three very good ones. The generality of voices are basses, which for want of better are thrust up into the first characters, even in serious operas where they used only to occupy the last place, to the manifest injury of melody, and total subversion of harmony, in which the lowest part is their peculiar province.

These new first singers are called by the novel appellation of *basso cantante* (which by the bye is a kind of apology, and an acknowledgment that they ought not to sing) and take the lead in operas with almost as much propriety as if the double bass were to do so in the orchestra, and play the part of the first fiddle. A bass voice is too unbending, and deficient in sweetness for single songs, and fit only for those of inferior character, or of the buffo style. In duettos it does not coalesce well with a female voice, on account of the too great distance between them, and in fuller pieces the ear cannot be satisfied

without some good intermediate voices to fill up the interval, and complete the harmony. Yet three or four basses now frequently overpower one weak tenor, who generally plays but a subordinate part.*

Composers therefore having few good voices, and few good singers to write for, have been obliged to adapt their compositions to the abilities of those who were to perform them; and as four, five, or six moderate performers produce a better effect jointly than they could by their single efforts, songs have disappeared, and interminable quartettos, quintettos, sestettos, &c. usurp their place. Every opera is filled with such pieces,

* It has always surprised me that the principal characters in two of Mozart's operas should have been written for basses, namely, Count Almaviva, and Don Giovanni, both of which seem particularly to want the more lively tones of a tenor; and I can account for it no otherwise than by supposing they were written for some particular singer who had a bass voice, for he has done so in no other instance.

which in fact are so many finales, such as formerly were never used but at the end of the acts of comic operas, to which alone they are appropriate.* These after wearying the attention for a longer time than half a dozen old songs, generally conclude by a noisy crash of voices and instruments, in which the harmony is frequently distracted, each personage engaged in the scene having perhaps to express a different passion, and the whole vocal part almost overpowered by so loud and busy an accompaniment that the voices themselves are nearly lost. It is really distressing to hear the leading voice strained almost to cracking, in order to be audible over a full chorus and full orchestra, strengthened often by trumpets, trombones, kettle-drums, and all the noisiest instruments. I confess

* In serious operas, while they were in three acts, the two first were ended by a duetto of the first man and woman, and a terzetto with the tenor. The inferior singers never joined in any concerted piece.

that I derive little or no pleasure from these pieces, which to my ears are scarcely music, but mere noise.* It is evident that in such compositions each individual singer has little room for displaying either a fine voice or good singing, and that power of lungs is more essential than either. Very good singers therefore are scarcely necessary, and it must be confessed that though there are now none so good, neither are there many so bad as I remember in the inferior characters. In these levelling days, equalization has extended itself to the stage and musical profession; and a kind of mediocrity of talent prevails, which, if it did not occasion the

* I would not be understood to mean that I like no sort of pezzi concertati or chorus. I would only have them in their proper place, fewer and shorter. No opera chorusses are very good, and they should not be long, because being to be sung by memory and by bad singers, it is next to an impossibility that an intricate or elaborate composition should be sung well any where, and at our opera they are generally most miserably performed.

invention of these melo-dramatic pieces is at least very favourable to their execution.*

These observations apply in the strongest manner to the compositions of the present favourite (I might almost say sole) composer

* Since the above was written, I have met with a passage in Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Literature (translated by Black), so entirely corroborating what I have said, that I cannot help subjoining it.

"A few only of the operas of Metastasio still keep "possession of the stage, as the change of taste in music "demands a different arrangement of the text. Metas- "tasio seldom has chorusses, and his airs are almost "always for a single voice: with these the scenes uni- "formly terminated, and the singer never fails to make "his exit with them. In an opera we now require "more frequent duos and trios, and a *crashing* finale. "In fact, the most difficult problem for the opera poet "is the mixing the complicated voices of conflicting "passions in one common harmony, without injuring "their essence: a problem however which is generally "solved by both poet and musical composer in a very "arbitrary manner." The consequence of this is that all the new dramas written for Rossini's music, are most execrably bad, and contain scarcely one line that can be called poetry, or even one of common sense.

of Italy, Rossini, whose music alone is now liked in that country, and with which for several seasons we were satiated in this. That he is possessed of genius and invention cannot be denied, but they are not guided by good taste, and may be deemed too fanciful: neither are they inexhaustible, for he is so rapid and so copious a writer that his imagination seems already to be nearly drained, as no one is so great a plagiarist of himself. His compositions are so similar, and bear so strong a stamp of peculiarity and *mannerism*, that while it is impossible not to recognize instantly a piece of music as his, it is frequently difficult to distinguish one from another. At least I frankly confess my inability to do so, and that very few of his compositions remain in my memory. This great sameness is of course augmented in no slight degree by the style now in vogue. If a single piece of music (or what is to be considered as such) is to contain as many different subjects as would make three or four,

the composer's imagination must be wonderfully fertile indeed if the same ideas did not often recur, as the demand for new is at least quadrupled.

Of the operas of Rossini that have been performed here, that of La Gazza Ladra is most peculiarly liable to all the objections I have made to the new style of drama, of which it is the most striking example. Its finales, and many of its very numerous *pezzi concertati* are uncommonly loud, and the lavish use made of the *noisy* instruments appears to my judgement singularly inappropriate to the subject, which though it might have been rendered touching,* is far from calling for such warlike accompaniments. Nothing can be more absurd than the manner in which this simple story is represented in the Italian piece (taken, as well as the English one on the same subject, from La pie

* That it may be so in a high degree, all must have felt who have seen Miss Kelly act the part in the Maid and the Magpie.

voleuse), or than to see a young peasant servant girl, accused of a petty theft, led to trial and execution under a guard of soldiers with military music. But this is a *melodrama*, in which it is not merely allowable but almost necessary to violate truth, nature, and probability. This can have been done only to afford the composer an opportunity of indulging his taste for the *fortissimo*.

The opera of Tancredi is much liked by his admirers, and there are certainly two or three very good and pleasing pieces of music in it: but when the principal, or at least the favourite, song of a first man in a *heroic* opera is not only capable of being converted into a *quadrille*, but appears better adapted to that purpose than any other, all idea of its propriety and fitness for its situation must be put totally out of the question. Yet such is the case with the famous air, Di tanti palpiti, which, though pleasing in itself, is composed extremely in the style of a real French *contredanse*. But not this only has been so con-

verted; half of Rossini's operas are turned into quadrilles; nay even Mosé in Egitto, *a sacred Oratorio!* Were it possible so to convert Handel's, we should deem it a *profanation.* But what shall we think of the judgement of that composer who could set solemn words to music so light and trivial as to allow of it? I have often heard it seriously remarked, that his operas sound best when thus performed *without* the voices. Strange praise for *vocal* music, which I have ever considered as the finest vehicle for feeling and for passion, and as giving greater expression to words than can otherwise be conveyed; therefore when it is really good they must be inseparably united. At the same time I must allow there is truth in the remark, for Rossini gives so much importance to the orchestra, and so labours his accompaniments, that the vocal part is really often the least prominent, and overwhelmed, not supported.*

* Many songs of the old masters would be very indifferently sung by modern performers, not on account

The serious operas of Mosé in Egitto (performed here under the name of Pietro l'Eremita) and Otello, are much better than the former which I have named, and contain some very fine pieces: and I must exempt from all censure his Turco in Italia, which is a light, lively, and thoroughly pleasant opera buffa. The Barbiere di Seviglia, La Cenerentola, L'Italiana in Algieri, and Elisabetta, have been also performed, the first with success, the others with little or none.*

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of their difficulty, but their apparent facility. Composers, when writing for a first-rate singer, noted down merely a simple *tema* with the slightest possible accompaniment, which, if sung as written, would be cold, bald, and insipid. It was left to the singer to fill up the outline, to give it the light and shade, and all its grace and expression; which required not only a thorough knowledge of music, but the greatest taste and judgement. No one ever worked on such a canvas like Pacchierotti.

* Since the above was written, many more of Rossini's operas have been performed, La Donna del Lago, Ricciardo, which have been liked, and another that

So entirely did Rossini engross the stage, that the operas of no other master were ever to be heard, with the exception of those of Mozart, and of his, only Don Giovanni and Le Nozze di Figaro were often repeated. La Clemenza di Tito was occasionally revived, but met with less success. It is singular how every other composer, past and present, were totally put aside, and those two alone named or thought of. That Mozart should be admired is not at all so, for he was undoubtedly one of the greatest of masters: it is only strange that though he has been so long dead, his works should have been but so lately known and performed in this country. Of their beauty, their originality, their infinite variety, and scientific excellence there

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failed totally. Having been unable to go to the theatre I have heard none of them; from the opera books I find there is *not one* song in Ricciardo, and scarcely any in La Donna del Lago. Semiramide has perhaps been the greatest favourite. I once heard it, and shall mention it in its place.

can be but one opinion, though by some his style may be thought not quite so agreeable as that of some of the excellent Italian masters whom I have had occasion to name. It may at times have a little too much of the German manner, as many of his operas were composed for his native language and German singers. But his genius was not only original, it was inexhaustible; his productions are full of diversity, and all possessed of intrinsic merit. The frippery and meretricious style of modern music is to the ear like tinsel to the eye, brilliant, striking, for a moment perhaps captivating, but it will be transitory, and speedily lost in the fluctuations of taste; and I think I may venture to predict, that Rossini will not long have ceased to write before he will cease to be remembered, and that his music will be thrown aside as that of so many of his predecessors and superiors already is; while the name of Mozart, with those of his two great countrymen Handel and Haydn, will live for ever, and his compo-

sitions, like theirs, descend as sterling gold to posterity, and be listened to with delight in all times and in all places, so long as the natural taste and feeling for music, common to man in all ages and situations, and the love of its true genuine beauties, shall continue to exist.

But it is time to return, after too long a digression, to my original purpose, and to take a brief notice of the singers who appeared at our Opera during this period.

After Catalani left this country, the opera gradually declined, and fell at last to such a state of degradation as to cease to be fashionable, and be nearly deserted.

Grassini returned in 1814, but she was no longer what she had been. Her beauty indeed was little diminished, but her acting was more languid and ineffective, at least it appeared so after the more energetic and animated manner of her predecessor. Her voice too was changed; she had endeavoured to regain its upper part, but in so doing she had

lost the lower, and instead of a mellow contralto, it was become a hoarse soprano. Still, however, she displayed much of her former grace and style, particularly in her favourite part of Orazia, and in a new opera of Didone by Paër. But on the whole her performance did not satisfy the public, and after one season she departed unregretted. At the same time Tramezzani also went away.

The next year is a *blank* in operatical history. So wretchedly bad were all the male performers that even their names cannot be remembered. The first woman, Sessi, was alone somewhat of a singer, with whom, though it was difficult to find fault, it was equally so to be pleased.

The following season produced another total change, yet not much for the better. The company was a medley of all nations; of Russian, Spanish, French, English, with a very small intermixture of Italians. It is true Fodor was an improvement upon Sessi, but she never greatly pleased me. Her voice

had sweetness, but she injured and confined it by not opening her mouth, and singing through her teeth. Her style was not truly Italian, nor could it be expected, for she is a Russian married to a Frenchman, had lived much in Paris, and never been in Italy: she is now gone thither and may improve. Yet she was much liked by many, and became almost a favourite after her performance of Zerlina in Don Giovanni, which opera was brought out for the first time in the second year of her engagement, when a very considerable augmentation was made to the strength of the company; to which were then added Camporese (of whom I shall speak more fully) and Crevelli, an excellent tenor of the old school, with a sonorous mellow voice, and a really good method of singing: but he was reckoned dull, met with no applause, and staid only one year. A new buffo, Ambrogetti, was much more successful. He was indeed deservedly liked, for he was an excellent actor, with a natural vein of humour

peculiarly his own; but he was sometimes put into characters unsuited to his turn, to his want of voice, and deficiency as a singer. Yet he acted extremely well, and in a manner too horribly true to nature, the part of the mad father in Paër's beautiful opera of Agnese,* while that of the daughter was delightfully sung by Camporese. These additional performers, together with the production of Don Giovanni, and of the Nozze di Figaro, were very attractive, and again filled the theatre. Camporese, however, was suffered to go at the end of the season, to the prosperity of which she had so much contributed, and Fodor remained sole first woman for another year.

The opera again declined during that and two following seasons, when Fodor was succeeded by Belloc,† who, though a good

* This drama is taken from Mrs. Opie's tale of the Father and Daughter.

† Her name was here *Italianized* into *Bellocchi*, but she is married to a Frenchman named Belloc.

singer and actress in comic operas, was not pleasing from the coarseness of her voice and plainness of her person. She was rather like Storace, possessing most of her defects without all her excellencies. She however surprised the public towards the close of her engagement by her excellent performance of the part of Tancredi, for which nothing could be less suited than her figure; but the music was well adapted to her voice, and her singing it was really so good as to make her appearance of no consequence.

The company for the three following seasons was throughout respectable, though without any very prominent talent among the male performers. Among them however may be distinguished the first tenor Curioni, who has a very sweet and pleasing voice, and is an agreeable though not a great singer; and Zucchelli, who possesses the most soft, mellow, and flexible bass voice I almost ever heard. But it was headed by two excellent first women, Ronzi de Begnis, and Camporese.

The former, with a pretty face and pleasing countenance, has a voice of great sweetness and flexibility, which she manages with considerable skill and taste, is a good singer, and a good actress, both in serious and comic parts. But she decidedly excels most in the latter. Indeed I have rarely seen a better buffa. She made her first appearance in Il Turco in Italia, and acted in it delightfully. Her husband, De Begnis, is an excellent comic actor.

Camporese's talent is of a higher order. Born of respectable parents, and married to a member of the family of Giustiniani, she originally cultivated music only as an accomplishment, yet made herself complete mistress of its science. Subsequent events occasioned her converting what had been her amusement into her profession, and she became a public singer for concerts only.

It was not till her first arrival in this country that she ever appeared on the stage, which she soon trod with all the ease of an

experienced actress, and became immediately a very good theatrical performer, yet still retaining on the stage the genteel, lady-like manners for which she is distinguished in private society. She performed first in an opera called Penelope, which was not much admired, nor acted very often; consequently she did not make so favourable an impression as might have been expected from her talents; but every succeeding one developed them more and more, and added to her reputation. Amongst her happiest efforts must be ranked the beautiful and affecting part of Agnese before alluded to. That opera, which is of the *semi-seria* kind, is one of Paër's most charming compositions. She excels greatly in Desdemona, and in the opera of Mosé; in the latter Ronzi took a principal character. They likewise sung together in Don Giovanni and Le Nozze di Figaro, Camporese performing Zerlina and Susanna, Ronzi Donna Anna and the Countess Almaviva; but in both these instances they should have changed

characters; for as Ronzi, by her figure, countenance, and sprightliness, is best fitted for comic parts, so are Camporese's whole style and demeanour most adapted for serious. In her first year she acted Donna Anna admirably to Fodor's Zerlina, but afterwards assumed the latter from the greater popularity of its many light and pleasing airs. In La Clemenza di Tito she performed the first man's part, Sesto, and from its being written for a soprano, and therefore suited to her voice, gave more effect to it than either Braham or Tramezzani. She first acted that opera with Fodor, afterwards with Madame Albert, first singer of the *grand opera* at Paris, who chanced to be in England with her husband, the principal dancer. It was a curious novelty to hear a French singer in our Italian theatre, where, though she did not offend, she gave but little pleasure. But she was a good musician, had great powers, and of course a thorough knowledge of the stage, on which her manner was easy and dignified.

Of Camporese's voice, and manner of singing, it may be said, that the former, if not of the very finest quality, is extremely agreeable, of sufficient power and compass, and capable of considerable agility: and of the latter, that it is regulated by good taste, and is full of feeling and expression. In short, she is worthy of the better days of the art, and, when she first came to this country, had in no degree adopted the modern style. She then sung only the compositions of the best masters, and her execution of them was faultless. On her return, from having in the interval sung to Italian audiences the more modern music, her manner had undergone a perceptible alteration; so *infectious* is taste, and so easily, perhaps unconsciously, is it vitiated by bad example, either in singers or composers. She however yielded as little as possible to the prevailing style, and, even with this slight reservation, still was, in my opinion, much the best singer of her time, and the only one that ever at all brought

back to my recollection, or in any degree resembled her to whom I shall always think every other must yield, the unique, the incomparable Banti.*

* On leaving England she retired from the stage, and lived at Rome under her proper name of Madame Giustiniani, enjoying ease and respectability, exercising her unimpaired talents for the pleasure of her friends, and never singing out of her own house. But, after a few years, some pecuniary embarrassments induced her to resume her profession. She returned to England, and sung at concerts, there being no vacancy at the opera. Her powers (as I was told, for I did not hear her) were somewhat diminished, and she met but with little success. She staid only a short time.

SECTION VIII.

Observations on English music—Sacred music—Glees —Mrs. Sheridan—Mrs. Bates—the Misses Abrams.

Having thus completed the account of the Italian Opera from my earliest recollection for fifty years, I will, before I conclude, say something of our national music, and of a few English performers, but my remarks shall be very short.

Our theatrical music must be acknowledged by all candid judges to be greatly inferior to the Italian, although of late years it has improved, and if it continues to do so, and the latter still to decline, the difference will be, and indeed it already is, much less striking than it was within my remembrance. But I shall not add any thing on that subject

to the casual notices that have been taken of our stage.

In another style I think we greatly excel, namely, in our church music. I have always been very fond of that of our cathedrals, which is truly solemn and elevating, and better suited to aid devotion than any other that I know. That of the Italians is in general too light and operatic (I except that of the Pope's chapel), and in all Roman Catholic countries the introduction of an orchestra of stringed instruments greatly takes away from the solemnity of the performance. The full swelling tones of the sublime organ should alone be heard, as in our's. With that sole accompaniment, our English services, well performed, are to me of the finest description. Sacred music in general has been much esteemed and cultivated since the introduction of Oratorios by Handel, and has been executed with great excellence by performers of our own country, among whom Mr. Harrison was long a favourite, and

justly; for he had one of the softest, most mellow tenor voices I ever heard, and a chaste style of singing: his only fault was want of energy and animation, which made his performance rather dull and heavy. Mr. Bartleman, who is fresh in every one's recollection, was equally admired for his fine bass, or baritone voice, and for his masterly manner of singing.

There is another species of composition more peculiarly our own, and which I should call our only national music; I mean our glees, which differ from any thing I ever heard, and in their style cannot be excelled. Their harmony is so full, rich, and melodious, when executed, as they long were, by the Messrs. Knyvett, and the other performers accustomed to sing them together, that they completely gratify the ear, and he must be indeed fastidious, or greatly prejudiced, who cannot receive pleasure from their performance. I do not know of any female singer at present who has exclusively devoted herself

to this kind of music, but there have been several; and none who do not keep solely to it can execute them with equal propriety. If the leading voice permits itself to wander from the strict melody of the air, in order to show graces or agility, as is too frequently the case when singers accustomed to other styles are called in, the effect is injured instead of being improved, as the great beauty of those compositions is derived from the complete union and equality of all the voices, none preponderating, and from the simplicity of their execution. They then produce the effect of full chords struck on a finely toned organ.*

But I have deviated widely from my chief purpose in entering at all upon this subject, which was to mention two great performers whom having once heard it is impossible not to remember, or, remembering, to pass over in silence. As my recollections extend

* This species of music has of late years gone out of fashion, but seems to be reviving in the production of old madrigals, and composing of new.

to half a century, I am old enough to have heard, as amateurs, those most delightful singers of this, or of any other country, Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Bates, who as Miss Linley and Miss Harrop were at the top of their profession, which they both quitted on marrying, while in the prime of life, and at the height of their reputation. Mrs. Sheridan to an angelic face (of the peculiar expression of which those who never saw her may form some idea from Sir Joshua's Reynolds' beautiful portrait of her as St. Cecilia)* added an angelic voice, of so sweet and delightful a tone and quality that it went at once to the heart; and, combined with her touching expression, produced an effect almost heavenly, and moved every hearer. I heard her more than once when I was very young, and the recollection has never been effaced.

Of Mrs. Bates I am much better able to speak, having frequently met her in private

* This portrait is now at Bowood, the seat of the Marquess of Lansdowne.

society, and heard her sing repeatedly. Her voice was perhaps not so *celestial* as Mrs. Sheridan's but was nevertheless one of the finest quality; full, rich, and commanding, of great compass, flexibility, and power. In her youth she had learnt of Sacchini, and had she continued his scholar, would have become an excellent singer in the Italian school; but having attracted the admiration of Mr. Joah Bates, he took her from that master, and finished her musical education himself. He was not a professor of music, but most deeply skilled in its science, and a masterly player on the organ. His taste was exclusively for Handel, and it was he who first imagined and arranged the marvellous performances in Westminster Abbey, which nobody but himself could have conducted to such perfection.* Of course he imparted his taste to Miss Harrop, and she from that time

* It was a subject of regret that Mrs. Bates was not permitted to sing at them; great as Mara was, her performance would have been still finer.

devoted herself almost wholly to Handel's music, in which she not only most excelled, but never was surpassed. I have however heard her sing in both styles, and execute extremely well fine theatrical songs of her first master's composition. I have also known her to go out upon a staircase, and there sing without accompaniment, the simple ballad, "Shepherds, I have lost my love," making the whole house ring with the volume of her voice, which came over the ear with a most beautiful and almost magical effect.

No subsequent singers have ever come up to these two, nor can any of the present day, however much they may be admired, be put into competition with them. Of all other English singers, Mrs. Billington alone was as good, but her voice was decidedly inferior to their's, and her style so different, that she cannot fairly be compared with them, but must be reckoned more as an Italian than an English singer, and as such has received all the notice and praise to which she is justly entitled.

There is but one name more that I shall mention, and that very slightly; but when excellence in music is the subject, it cannot be omitted. It is that of the Misses Abrams, who were unrivalled in their line, and whose united voices formed the very perfection of harmony. But of them I shall not permit myself to speak; private friendship might make my praise appear too partial. I restrain myself with the less regret from saying what I feel, because their talents (still fresh in the remembrance of many) and their merits of every kind are too widely known to need my panegyric, and too universally acknowledged to admit of the possibility of contradiction.*

* Of the three sisters one only survives; Miss Theodosia, now Mrs. Garrow, whose voice was the most beautiful contralto I ever heard. They all left off public singing many years ago.

SECTION IX.

1824—1828.

Colbrun — Catalani — Pasta — Caradori — Velluti— Sontag—General Remarks and Retrospection.

With the last Section these Reminiscences originally did, and perhaps ought still to end: for after this period I was for a long time unable to go at all to the theatre. But as the following seasons were eventful, I subjoin an account of them chiefly from report.

The season of 1824 produced an unusually large company of singers, no less than *six* prima donnas having performed during the course of it: namely, Madame Colbrun Rossini, Catalani, Ronzi de Begnis, Pasta, Vestris, and Caradori. The first of these, as Colbrun, was long esteemed the finest in Italy, both

as singer and actress. She is now married to Rossini, with whom she came hither, both being engaged on high terms, she to sing, and he to compose; but both disappointed expectation. She is entirely *passée*, and her powers are so diminished that she is unable to produce any effect on the stage, where she gave little satisfaction: but her taste was acknowledged to be excellent, and she was much admired in private concerts. She appeared in her husband's opera of Zelmira, which was not liked. It contains, as I was told, some of his *noisiest* pieces, of which I subsequently heard one at a concert; it was stunning. Rossini himself was so much engaged in pleasures and convivial meetings, as well as singing with great profit in private, that he neglected his engagement with the theatre, and did not complete the opera he was to have composed. He paid forfeit for his failure; but nevertheless he and his wife realized a large sum before they left the country.

Catalani, who had come to England on a journey of speculation, was not regularly engaged, but only paid for occasional appearances, and as her terms were more advantageous to herself than to the manager, and her attraction not great, they were very few. She did not perform any of her fine tragic characters, but acted, five or six times only, her favourite comic opera Il Fanatico per la Musica, in which she introduced some new song every night. Her powers were said to be undiminished, her taste unimproved.

Ronzi retained her former favour; but even she was soon eclipsed by the arrival of Pasta, who had sung here before, as second woman, in the year Camporese first came to England. She was then a young and promising singer, but, though very pleasing, was little noticed. This was fortunate for her, as here she might have remained in mediocrity; but returning to Italy she has there so improved as to have become a capital performer, and is now at the very head of her

profession. She will be spoken of more at large hereafter.

The other two above named are but second-rate prima, though first-rate seconda donnas. The versatility of Madame Vestris's talent is well known, fitting her equally for the Italian, French, and English stage. Her first theatrical appearance was in Grassini's part of Proserpina, which she acted in two successive seasons with Sessi, and with Fodor. She then gave promise of higher excellence than she has attained, but still she must be allowed to be a pleasing singer, and a very good actress. Caradori is a *nom de théâtre;* this amiable and interesting young lady is of a good German family; her name was Mademoiselle Munk, and now is Mrs. Allan; but she retains, and is better known by her theatrical appellation. I shall shortly speak more of her.* The male singers of

* It may be observed as an odd coincidence that Pasta, Vestris, and Caradori all have acted the Page in Le Nozze di Figaro, and none more successfully than

this year were nearly the same as in the two preceding.

With all this collection of talent, the season failed; nor could it well be otherwise from the enormous expense of so unnecessarily numerous a company; but other causes contributed to its bad success. Soon after its termination all the contents of the Opera-house were advertised for sale, and it appeared probable it had closed to open no more. Interminable disputes and litigation, mismanagement, and repeated losses, seemed to threaten ruin to whomsoever should be bold enough to undertake it; but by some arrangement the sale never took place, and the same manager ventured to run the hazard of renewing his lease.

If the last season ended unsuccessfully, that

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the last, who by accident, not choice, made her début in that part; and it proved fortunate for her, as her charming manner of performing it laid the foundation of her subsequent favour.

of 1825 began in no very auspicious manner; for when the theatre was about to open, an alarm was raised that the house was insecure, from one of the main walls having given way. The licence was immediately suspended till it should be examined, and substantially repaired, so as to remove every suspicion of danger. For this purpose it was found necessary to pull down and rebuild the wall of one end, a work which was immediately commenced. The manager engaged temporarily the New Theatre Royal in the Haymarket, which, though much larger than that where the Opera had twice taken refuge, was nevertheless much too small to accommodate the subscribers, and receive such audiences as could afford any hope of profit to the concern, for which a company had been provided proportionate to the large theatre. Comic operas were chiefly acted there, in which Ronzi and Vestris were the principal performers. Under these disad-

vantages passed a great part of the season with very moderate success.

At length the King's Theatre having been repaired with incredible celerity, the Opera removed *home*, and shortly after the great favourite Pasta arrived for a limited number of nights. During her stay the theatre prospered exceedingly, crowded audiences attending it whenever she performed. About the same time Ronzi fell ill, and totally lost her voice, so that she was obliged to throw up her engagement and return to Italy. Madame Vestris too having seceded from the Opera to confine herself entirely to the English stage, where she is so deservedly a favourite, and Caradori unable for some time to perform, it became necessary, in order to repair these losses, to engage a young singer, the daughter of the tenor Garcia, who had sung here for several seasons. She was as yet a mere girl, and had never appeared on any public stage: but from the first moment of her appearance she showed evident talents

for it both as singer and actress. Her extreme youth, her prettiness, her pleasing voice, and sprightly easy action, as Rosina in Il Barbiere di Seviglia, in which part she made her début, gained her general favour; but she was too highly extolled, and injudiciously put forward as a prima donna, when she was only a very promising débutante, who in time, by study and practice, would in all probability, under the tuition of her father, a good musician, but (to my ears at least) a most disagreeable singer, rise to eminence in her profession. But in the following year she went with her whole family (all of whom, old and young, are singers *tant bons que mauvais*) to establish an Italian opera in America, where, it is said, she is married, so that she will probably never return to this country, if to Europe.*

I have now to record an event which

* This young débutante is now the celebrated Madame Malibran.

excited great curiosity in the musical world, and for a time was of considerable advantage to the theatre, closing its season with great éclat. This was the arrival of a male *soprano* singer, the only one left on the Italian stage, who has for many years, perhaps only from having no rival in his line, been looked upon as the best singer of his country. He came to this with strong and numerous recommendations, but under no engagement for the Opera, and he had been here some time before the manager dared to produce so novel and extraordinary a performer. No singer of this description had appeared here for a quarter of a century, so that the greater part of those who formerly were delighted with Pacchierotti, Marchesi, &c. were now no more, and a generation had sprung up who had never heard a voice of the sort, and were strongly prejudiced against it. His first reception at concerts was far from favourable, the scurrilous abuse lavished upon him before he was heard, cruel and illiberal: and it was

not till after long deliberation, much persuasion, and assurances of support, that the manager ventured to engage him for the remainder of the season. Even then, such was the popular prejudice and general cry raised against him, that unusual precautions were deemed necessary to secure a somewhat partial audience, and prevent his being driven from the stage on his very first entry upon it, which seemed to be a pre-determined measure. At length the first appearance of Signor Velluti was announced to take place, on an unusual night, *for his own benefit*, granted him, it was said, on account of the great trouble he had taken (to use a theatrical phrase) in *getting up* the new opera, which indeed was true, for, as he has a perfect knowledge of the stage, he entirely directed all the performances in which he took a part. As he had brought me a letter of introduction from a friend at Florence, and my curiosity was a good deal raised from the representation given to me of his talents, I

was induced once more to enter a theatre, and was present on that occasion. At the moment when he was expected to appear, the most profound silence reigned in one of the most crowded audiences I ever saw, broken on his advancing by loud applauses of encouragement. The first note he uttered gave a shock of surprize, almost of disgust, to inexperienced ears, but his performance was listened to with attention and great applause throughout, with but few *audible* expressions of disapprobation speedily suppressed. The opera he had chosen for his début was Il Crociato in Egitto, by a German composer named Mayerbeer, till then totally unknown in this country. The music was quite of the new school, but not copied from its founder Rossini: it was original, odd, flighty, and might even be termed *fantastic*, but at times beautiful; here and there most delightful melodies and harmonies occurred, but it was unequal. Solos were as rare as in all the modern operas, but the numerous

concerted pieces much shorter and far less noisy than Rossini's, consisting chiefly of duets and terzettos with but few chorusses, and no overwhelming accompaniments. Indeed Mayerbeer has rather gone into the contrary extreme, the instrumental parts being frequently so slight as to be almost meagre, while he has sought to produce new and striking effects from the voices alone. The first woman's part was filled by Caradori, the only singer left who could undertake it, Pasta's engagement having terminated, and her performance gave great satisfaction. Though from want of power she is not to be ranked in the first line of prima donnas, it may truly be said she is *without a fault*. Her voice is sweet, but not strong, her knowledge of music very great, her taste and style excellent, full of delicacy and expression. In a room she is a perfect singer. Her genteel and particularly modest manner, combined with a very agreeable person and countenance, render her a pleasing and interesting, though

not a surprizing performer. The young Garcia also appeared to advantage in this opera.

To speak more minutely of Velluti. This singer is no longer young, and his voice is in decay. It seems to have had considerable compass, but has failed (which is extraordinary) in its middle tones, many of which are harsh and grating to the ear. Some of his upper notes are still exquisitely sweet, and he frequently dwells on, swells, and diminishes them with delightful effect. His lower notes too are full and mellow, and he displays considerable art in descending from the one to the other by passages ingeniously contrived to avoid those which he knows to be defective. His manner is florid without extravagance, his embellishments (many of which were new to me) tasteful and neatly executed. His general style is the *grazioso*, with infinite delicacy and a great deal of expression, but never rising to the grand, simple, and dignified *cantabile* of the old

school, still less to the least approach towards the *bravura*. He evidently has no other, therefore there is a great want of variety in his performance, as well as a total deficiency of force and spirit. Of the great singers mentioned before, he most resembles Pacchierotti, in one only, and that the lowest of his styles, but cannot be compared to him in excellence even in this. He is also somewhat like him in figure, but far better looking; in his youth he was reckoned remarkably handsome. On the whole there is much to approve and admire in his performance, and I can readily believe that in his prime he was not unworthy of the reputation he has attained in Italy. Even here, under so many disadvantages, he produced considerable effect, and overcame much of the prejudice raised against him. To the old he brought back some pleasing recollections; others, to whom his voice was new, became reconciled to it, and sensible of his merits, whilst many declared that to the last his tones gave them

more pain than pleasure. However, either from curiosity or real admiration, he drew crowded audiences, and no opera but the Crociato was performed to the end of the season.

The next (of 1826) began also with the same opera, but very differently performed.* Caradori, though still belonging to the company, was unaccountably removed for the purpose of introducing a new singer of the name of Bonini, and Garcia's place was filled by a performer below mediocrity. The new first woman having frequently sung with, and been taught by Velluti, was brought over at his recommendation and desire. She was not without merit, and it was not easy to say what were her faults; but it was impossible she should please: neither her voice nor her style had any peculiar

* Caradori produced for her benefit Spontini's opera, La Vestale, which was much admired in Germany, but did not succeed here.

excellence or defects; her person was small and very plain, and she was no actress. She was little attended to, and though never calling down disapprobation, was never applauded. Velluti's favour sensibly declined, and in his second opera, called Tebaldo e Isolina, by Morlacchi, which he considers as his chef-d'œuvre, he was much less admired than in the former. For his benefit this year (which I also went to), he brought out Aureliano in Palmira, one of the first compositions of Rossini, and the only one of his operas in which he ever would sing. It is in my opinion one of the best of that master, as he had not yet, in his efforts at originality, fallen into that wild unnatural style which characterizes so many of his works. There are in it many beautiful melodies, and but little of the extravagant ornament and cramped passages he subsequently delighted to introduce. Those who are more conversant with his compositions, and can remember them (which I have professed I cannot)

say that this opera has been a nursery from whence he has drawn much for his later productions, and that there is scarcely one good motivo in it which he has not transplanted into some other. The first woman's part was again filled by Bonini, a miserable representative of the heroic Zenobia. But I now discovered why Velluti preferred her to any other performer. Pasta had returned to England some time before for her usual short engagement, but they never appeared in the same opera. This was thought to be occasioned by jealousy or rivalry in one or both: Velluti however was in the right to decline it. She would not only have overpowered him with the strength and volume of her voice, but her style is so different, often so superior to his own, that they could never have harmonized well: whereas Bonini, trained by him, accustomed to sing with him, and having acquired all his peculiar graces, was exactly suited to him by equality of power, and similarity of style: in the duettos

accordingly nothing could be more perfect than the union of their voices.

I was enabled to form this judgment and comparison by having, at an earlier period of the season been present at Pasta's benefit, and witnessed her performance of Mayer's celebrated opera of Medea. Having heard her once before at a private concert, with, I own, less pleasure than I had anticipated, I had much curiosity to see her on the stage, and there she fully answered my highest expectations. In a small room her voice was too loud, and sometimes harsh; her manner too forcible and vehement:* but in the

* It may here be remarked that the modern music spoils the singers for concerts, especially in private houses. The constantly singing concerted pieces, adapted only for the theatre, gives them the habit of so forcing their voices that they know not how to moderate them to the small space of an ordinary room. Neither are noisy finales and such like pieces suited to the place, or agreeable, without the orchestra and without action. The ear is often absolutely pained by

theatre all blemishes disappeared: she is really a first-rate performer, both as singer and actress, and that by mere dint of talent, without any very pre-eminent natural qualifications; for, though a pretty woman, her figure is short and not graceful; and her voice, though powerful and extensive, is not of the very finest quality, not free from defects. No part could be more calculated to display her powers than that of Medea, which affords opportunities for the deepest pathos, and the most energetic passion. In both she was eminently successful, and her

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their loudness. Add to this, that few singers can venture upon pieces so difficult and intricate, without having practised them together: so that the frequenters of the opera hear again in concerts only the same music they are perhaps satiated with at the theatre. How different this from the time when Pacchierotti, Mara, &c., could charm with an endless variety of the most beautiful songs, as well as by the delicacy of their execution of them.

performance both surprized and delighted me. None since Banti's had equalled it, and perhaps she even excelled her great predecessor as an actress, though in quality and sweetness of voice she infinitely falls short of her. It would be unfair not to add that the whole opera was well performed. Caradori acted and sung charmingly, the tender, gentle part of Creusa, and Curioni was animated and effective in that of Jason. Even the second tenor, Torri, who possesses a very sweet, but feeble voice, filled very creditably the part assigned to him. He has much taste, and is a pleasing singer in a room.

Pasta's other principal characters are that of Romeo, of Zingarelli; Semiramide, of Rossini; and Tancredi, all of which she is said to perform admirably. In the last, her manner of singing Di tanti palpiti is much better than that of any other performer of the part: she sings it much slower, thereby doing away, in a great degree, with its

country-dance-like character.* She has also appeared in Paësiello's Nina, but in that is reported to have failed, making the character rather imbecile than insane. The opera too was mangled and curtailed into one act, and even so thought too long and tiresome, so entirely has taste changed, and the music of one of the most delightful of all Italian masters gone out of fashion.

At the end of the season Pasta and Velluti both left England; the former with pressing invitations to return, the latter probably never to be again engaged at our Opera. But he came again several seasons for a short time, to sing at concerts, and teach music, having opened an academy for that purpose.

* This seems to be the more proper, as the motivo is taken from a Latin Litany, which Rossini has not scrupled to adopt as his own: his other favourite cavatina, Di piacer mi balza il core, is a wild air sung by the Sicilian peasants: so much for the *originality* of his two most popular songs.

The next was ushered in by the announcement of a most numerous company; but of the long list, comprehending names of great note, scarcely any were engaged for the whole season. Caradori opened it, but was soon superseded by a Miss Fanny Ayton, who in her turn yielded to a Signora Giacinta Toso. The former of these, a young English woman who has acted in Italy, is said to have some merit, but an indifferent voice. The second has the recommendation not only of a brilliant voice, but of extraordinary beauty: but this was her first appearance on any stage, and she is extremely young; consequently she cannot yet be a finished prima donna, whatever promise of future excellence she may hold out.* There came too a Signora Brizzi, a very weak contralta; and Brambilla, another *débutante*, with a fine voice of the same description. Madame Vestris was also

* She soon married Puzzi, the celebrated player on the horn.

occasionally called in. Pasta came in the spring as usual on a short engagement, and of course set aside all the others, or reduced them to seconda donnas. She performed for her benefit this year, an opera of Coccia's, called Maria Stuart, in which Madame Toso Puzzi also sung, but it did not greatly please. For Madame Puzzi's benefit, Didone, by Mercadante, was produced, she acting Æneas, and Pasta, Dido. This opera was a lamentable mangling of Metastasio's beautiful drama. Among the men, Zuchelli, so justly a favourite, remained only a short time, and was replaced by Galli, another basso cantante of eminence. Curioni was the only good permanent performer.

Such was the unsettled, fluctuating state of an inefficient company; such the lavish, ill-judged expense of a management, which can be productive of nothing but confusion. In fact, there seldom is now a complete established company, a new and most injudicious custom having prevailed of late years of divid-

ing the season into portions, one performer coming for the early, another for the latter part of it; some for three months, others for still shorter periods; so that the public may be deprived of their greatest favourite, and of the most admired operas, in the height of their popularity, and others substituted not so well approved. If this be unfair to the audiences, it is no less injurious to the manager, who thereby is not only kept in uncertainty, and may, by a non-arrival, be left without any singers at all, but incurs a great additional unnecessary expense. He announces six or seven prima donnas, of whom the principal demand nearly as large a salary for a short period as for a season, and the rest are to be paid no inconsiderable sums without the least benefit to the theatre.* Two female singers of the first class, a serious and a buffa, are all that are necessary, with a

* Pasta receives for three months *double* the salary Banti ever had for the whole season.

secondary capable of taking a leading part, or acting as substitute if required. More are positively an evil, and only embarrass the concern. It is impossible to employ them all advantageously, each will want to have her own opera, there being very few indeed in which there are two principal female characters; and from their contending claims, difficulties, disputes, and cabals, inevitably arise. Whilst enormous expense is thus lavished in superfluities, a mean economy prevails in all the inferior departments, with regard to secondary singers, the chorus and orchestra: the scenery, decorations, and wardrobe, are in every respect unworthy of the largest theatre in the country. The ballets too have latterly been of a very inferior description, scarcely above mediocrity. Such are the consequences of a bad system of government, and of the want of a manager conversant with the Italian stage, a good judge of music and of singers, acquainted with foreign languages and foreign usages,

of liberal ideas, not sparing of expense, but judicious in the application of it; knowing what is right, and firm in exercising his authority to enforce it: in short, one who can act for himself, and not be dependent on the ignorance or bad faith of subordinate agents. Such a one only can carry on the business of the theatre with success, and give to the English public a really good Italian opera.

While such is the mismanagement of affairs behind the curtain, those before it are on a no less improper footing. This will clearly appear, from a comparison of what the opera formerly was with what it is now. It will scarcely be credited by those who are not old enough to remember it, that at the period when these Reminiscences commence, and for many years subsequent to it, the price of a subscription to a box for *fifty* representations was *twenty guineas* a seat, so that there was a positive saving of five guineas on the season to every subscriber; and that too when the theatre was differently constructed,

and the private boxes were very few in number, not exceeding in all *thirty-six*, eighteen, ranged in three rows, on each side of the house;* the front being then occupied by open public boxes (or *amphithéâtre* as it is called in French Theatres) communicating with the pit. Both of these were filled exclusively with the highest classes of society, all, without exception, in the full dress then universally worn. The audiences thus assembled were considered as indisputably presenting a finer spectacle than any other theatre in Europe, and absolutely astonished the foreign performers, to whom such a sight was entirely new. At the end of the performance the company of the pit and boxes repaired to

* The boxes were then much larger and more commodious than they are now, and could contain with ease more than their allotted number of subscribers; far different from the miserable *pigeon-holes* of the present theatre, into which six persons can hardly be squeezed, of whom, in most situations, two thirds can never see the stage.

the coffee-room, which was then the best assembly in London, private ones being rarely given on opera nights, and all the first society was regularly to be seen there. Over the front box was the five shilling gallery; then resorted to by respectable persons not in full dress: and above that an upper gallery, to which the admission was three shillings. Subsequently the house was encircled by private boxes, yet still the prices remained the same, and the pit preserved its respectability and even grandeur till the old house was burnt down, in 1789. After its rebuilding, the subscription was raised to twenty-five guineas, and subsequently to thirty, but then the number of representations was increased to sixty, so that the admission never exceeded the usual pit price of half a guinea. Thus it continued the whole time that I was a subscriber to the opera. It was not till the second year of Catalani's engagement, when she more than doubled her demands, and obtained a salary wholly unprecedented, that the subscription

for a whole box was at once raised from *one hundred and eighty* to *three hundred guineas.** Thus has she permanently injured the establishment; for the price once raised, has never been lowered, or at most in a very trifling degree; and it is become quite impossible for persons of moderate incomes to afford so unreasonable a sum for a mere entertainment. Hence has arisen the custom of halving and sub-dividing the subscriptions, so that very few persons have now the sole ownership of a box. Hence too, that of letting them for the night, and of selling even single tickets when not used by the proprietor. The evil of this practice is evident. Formerly every lady possessing an opera box considered it as much her *home* as her house, and was as sure to be found there, few missing any of the

* In her first year Catalani had the same salary as Mrs. Billington, 2000 guineas (500 more than was paid to Banti). I heard her say that price was *ridiculously* low, and that to retain her, "*ci vogliono molte mila lire sterline.*" She demanded, and obtained *five thousand.*

performances. If prevented from going, the *loan* of her box, and the gratuitous use of the tickets was a favour always cheerfully offered and thankfully received as a matter of course, without any idea of payment. Then too it was a favour to ask gentlemen to belong to a box, when subscribing to one was actually advantageous. Now, no lady can propose to them to give her more than double the price of the admission at the door, so that having paid so exorbitantly, every one is glad to be reimbursed a part at least of the great expense which she must often support alone. Boxes and tickets therefore are no longer given, they are let for what can be got; for which traffic the circulating libraries afford an easy accommodation. Many too which are not taken for the season are disposed of in the same manner, and are almost put up to auction, their price varying from three to eight or even ten guineas, according to the performance of the evening, and other accidental

circumstances.* I have known an instance of a box being asked for in the morning for a particular opera, but not taken on account of the high price demanded: in the afternoon of the same day the same box was offered for half the sum, and then again rejected, from the suspicious appearance of the tender. The next morning the reason was discovered; *the opera had been changed.* This artifice requires no comment. In no other theatre in any country was such uncertainty of prices ever heard of: they every where are, and ought to be, fixed and invariable.

While the boxes are thus let at prices so much too high, admissions to the pit are to be purchased beneath their proper value.

* Even the performers who have benefits now advertise what sum they will *condescend* to take for the boxes in each tier. The invariable rule formerly was half a guinea each person: they could demand no more: all beyond that sum was a gratuity, generally given to favourite performers.

Half a guinea has at all times been the established price for that part of the house; but by the convenient accommodation before alluded to they are now to be bought for inferior sums nightly, and if taken for the whole season, for not much more than half what it would cost to pay the entrance money at the door. This is as injurious and unfair to the proprietors of the theatre as the box system is to the frequenters of it. Besides these contrivances for filling the theatre, the manager has recourse to issuing orders of free admission (varying in number according to circumstances) that the benches may be occupied on unattractive nights: boxes even are frequently given away, or let for trifling sums, to create the delusive appearance of a crowded house, when in fact the money actually received is barely sufficient to cover the evening's expense.

From all these causes the whole style of the Opera House is totally changed, its audiences are of a different description, its comfort

entirely lost. The pit has long ceased to be the resort of ladies of fashion, and latterly, by the innovations introduced, is no longer agreeable to the former male frequenters of it.* Those who compose the best part of the audience, and who really pay the fair price, coming late to the theatre, find all the seats occupied by the holders of orders and of cheap admissions, while the boxes, being frequently filled by occasional hirers of them, afford no retreat to those who would visit the friends to whom they properly belong.† This is an abuse which the manager should rectify for his own sake; for that of the subscribers the rent of the boxes ought to be

* It has been improved since by parting off the front rows into single seats, called *stalls*, which may be hired by the night, or for a longer period.

† Most improper company is sometimes to be seen even in the principal tiers, and tickets bearing the names of ladies of the highest class have been presented by those of the *lowest*, such as used to be admitted only to the hindmost rows of the gallery.

lowered, if not to their original price, which may now be impossible, at least to one far beneath what is still demanded, though the first cause for raising it has long ceased. This might be done, if the establishment were judiciously managed, and its expenses reduced within reasonable bounds; especially as the term of all the boxes which were private property (originally assigned to the lenders of money for rebuilding the theatre) is now expired, and they are become that of the manager, by which a very large addition is made to the amount of the subscription. The only plea that can be adduced for not doing so, must be, the pecuniary embarrassments in which former managers have plunged the concern, the vast debt yet unpaid, and the endless law suits in which its affairs are still involved. To these difficulties it is almost hopeless to expect that an effectual remedy will be found, or that the encumbrances will ever be entirely shaken off. Certainly not as the concern is at present

conducted. The whole system is radically bad; and nothing can restore the Opera in this country to its former respectable and agreeable footing, or the performances to that excellence which a public paying so dearly has a right to expect, but a total reformation, an entire change of proprietors, of managers, of all parties connected with the theatre, I had almost said, hampered and embarrassed as it is, of the theatre itself.

The season of 1827 finished, as predicted, unsuccessfully, and the shutting up of the theatre entirely seemed to be the probable consequence. But out of evil good has arisen; and the changes above alluded to have in part taken place. The Opera has begun this year under better auspices and with better prospects. There is a tolerably efficient company of singers, with Pasta permanently at its head: there is also a good set of dancers, and (above all the most important) there is a new manager, much more likely to conduct the concern with judgment, and, consequently, with success.

Some time after the season had commenced, and after this account had been completed, the greatest curiosity and a most unusual sensation have been excited by the arrival of the celebrated German singer, Mademoiselle Sontag, whose fame had long since reached this country, and the most extravagant eulogiums had prepared us to see not only the finest performer that had yet appeared, both as singer and actress, but also one of the most beautiful of women. To say that she has entirely answered to this exaggerated description would be flattery as unfair as the praises have been injudicious. In consequence of her high reputation, she was received on her début, in the part of Rosina in the Barbiere di Seviglia, with enthusiastic applause, and crowded audiences have attended every night of her performance. Sharing with the public the eagerness to see and hear so great a prodigy, I again, after an interval of two years, went to the Opera, and saw her in the part of Donna Anna, in Don Giovanni. But I had previously

heard her at a public concert, and have since at a private one: as she gave me more pleasure on both those occasions than on the stage, my opinion shall be given as formed from those specimens rather than the other.

Mademoiselle Sontag, who is a very young, and certainly a pretty woman (from countenance and complexion rather than features), though far from being so transcendently handsome as represented, possesses a voice of great extent, brilliant clearness, and correct intonation. The upper notes are particularly good and pleasing, but the lower part of her voice is less sweet, and when forced beyond its natural strength, may be called rather shrill. It is not, in short, a true *voce di petto*, and has not the round, full, mellow tone peculiar almost to the Italians. Her powers of execution are very great, and the facility with which she performs difficult passages has perhaps never been surpassed. There is no appearance of effort or exertion, and no instrument could execute more neatly or

correctly. But there is a want of feeling and expression, both in the tone of her voice and her manner of singing, which (if the truth be confessed) render her a less satisfactory singer than many who have not her powers or talent. She appears to excel most (as it is natural she should) in the music of her own country in her native language. An air which I have twice heard her sing from the Freyschütz with the original words, was very beautiful, and she executed it with a simplicity that made it truly delightful. It may be said, to her praise, that she is not lavish of ornament for the sake of showing of what she is capable. Of the theatrical performance I witnessed I am sorry not to be able to speak with equal commendation. The part of Donna Anna does not suit her, and by over exerting her voice, especially in the concerted pieces, the shrillness alluded to was more apparent. As an actress she is genteel and graceful, and nothing more ; she is said to succeed better in lighter and gayer characters.

On the last occasion on which I heard her, she sung a duet with Pasta, which was most admirably performed, and their voices harmonized better than could have been expected from the difference of their quality. These two great singers ought not to be put into comparison with each other; for while clearness, neatness, and delicacy are the characteristics of Sontag, power, energy, and strong expression are those of Pasta, who must still retain her undisputed pre-eminence as the tragic heroine; while the other, by her real talent in her own line, will secure the continuance of a high degree of favour, though the expectation, too highly raised, may not have been completely satisfied.

The other parts of Don Giovanni were unequally filled. Caradori (whose benefit it was) sung sweetly, as she always does, that of Zerlina. Zuchelli, who is lately arrived, as the hero of the piece, was less lively and animated, and far less the libertine, than the original representative, Ambrogetti, but sung

the part much better, from the superior excellence of his voice, and greater delicacy of his manner, a quality in which he surpasses every bass singer I ever heard. Pellegrini, the Leporello, is a good buffo, but past his prime, and has nearly lost his voice. It was to be regretted that Curioni did not perform the tenor part, so well sung formerly by Crevelli; and the inferior characters were all less well filled than on its first performance in this country, and subsequent revivals.

In addition to the above-named performers, the opera company has been increased by another German singer, Madame Schutz, who has a fine mezzo soprano voice, and a good style of singing. She generally performs male characters, and made her début as Sesto in La Clemenza di Tito. Caradori being likewise a German, no less than three of the principal singers at the Opera are of that nation. On the whole, the company may now be considered as very complete, and the season promises to be by far the most successful of any of late years. But

there has been, and there is likely to be, little novelty in the operas. Two new ones only have been produced, and neither with much success. Both were *nominally* taken from the English history; Mayerbeer's Margherita di Anjou, and La Rosa Bianca e la Rosa Rossa, by Mayer. Caradori was prima donna in the first, Pasta in the second, but they were little liked, and not often acted. The eternal repetition of the same old operas must at last weary the public, but no prospect is held out of any more new ones during the present season.* Pasta continues to perform her favourite characters, and revivals only are talked of for Mademoiselle Sontag.

I cannot help here remarking, that never at any time within my memory was there so large a number of singers of eminence assembled at once in this country as at the present moment. Besides those engaged at the Opera, we now have Velluti, Ronzi, and

* Pasta brought out for her benefit, one by Bellini, called Norma; the scene of which is laid in Wales. It was not liked.

her husband De Begnis, Madame Toso Puzzi, and other good concert singers. To sum up all, Catalani is shortly expected, being engaged for the biennial musical festival at York. We shall then possess almost all the singers of great renown on the continent. The rage for music is revived throughout all classes, and certainly the taste of the public is much improved, good operas of Mozart, Salieri, Weber, and other excellent masters, having been performed in English with great success. The singers too are very superior to those of some of the preceding periods, in which I have had to complain of the want of excellence, as well as dearth of vocal performers. But while I give all due praise to *them*, I cannot be reconciled to many of the compositions they sing, and find no cause to retract any observations I have made on the general style of modern music.

May 1828.

SUPPLEMENT.

The First Edition of these Reminiscences gave an account of the Opera for fifty years only, when my personal knowledge of it in a great measure ceased. To every subsequent republication additions have been made, which have gradually extended it to above sixty. If, therefore, any trifling discrepancy should appear between the earlier and latter parts, it must be attributed to their being written at different intervals, and to the concluding sections being founded more on the reports of others, than on my own observation.

SUPPLEMENT.

SECTION X.

1829—1834.

Introduction—Farewell to Catalani—Italian Opera—Malibran, Pasta, &c.—German Opera—French Opera—Giulietta Grisi, &c.

When I ended the last section, I did not think ever to have written another: nothing could be further from my intention than to make any addition to this book, and though solicited more than once to continue my account of musical occurrences to the present period, I as often declined doing so, having more than ever renounced the opera, and gone to it (that is, the *Italian*) but twice during the last six years. I, therefore, am nearly ignorant of the performers and performances during that period, and have paid

so little attention to what was passing at the theatre that I cannot recollect the singers or the operas with any accuracy or order; still less can I pretend to give any criticisms of my own, or to speak of them in detail. Some whom I have occasionally heard in private concerts will be more particularly mentioned, and my opinion given on those performances which I have seen. My remarks on all the rest will be very short. Another circumstance, quite foreign to the Opera, has occasioned my writing at all, namely, the Musical Festival that has lately taken place in Westminster Abbey, to which these pages will be almost exclusively devoted. But not to leave so long an interval by passing abruptly to my principal subject, I have thought it better to insert a brief notice of the Opera, imperfect as it must be, since I closed the former edition of these Reminiscences, and make this assume a more connected form. Before, however, I do this, I cannot resist seizing the opportunity of taking my last leave of Catalani, though in

what I have to say I am personally concerned, and it may seem impertinent to introduce circumstances uninteresting to the generality of my readers. The admirers of that great singer will, I am persuaded, excuse me.

I mentioned at the end of the last section that Catalani was expected in England to sing at the music meeting at York. She came accordingly, in the course of the summer of 1828, to fulfil her engagement. When that was concluded, she traversed the whole island, and came, not professionally engaged, but on a tour of pleasure, to Plymouth (where she had been several years before), on a visit to the then Port Admiral, the late Earl of Northesk and his lady. Happening to be in the neighbourhood at that time, I had, of course, frequent opportunities of seeing her. During her stay of some weeks she was prevailed upon to give one public concert. There I again heard her sing, for the first time since she left the Opera in 1813. So much had been said of her falling off, and of the failure

of her voice, that I was most agreeably surprised at finding how little change there was in her, and how well she had retained her powers during so long a period, and when arrived to at least middle age. It was, indeed, still beyond any other younger voice. She said herself that she had lost some of its upper notes; but, she added, she had gained in expression what she had lost in compass, and therefore was, on the whole, a gainer. This was, indeed, true. She sung several songs in a style that no one else can equal, and concluded the concert with "God save the King," and "Rule Britannia," which last I always thought she sang better than any body. So she did on this occasion. It electrified and enraptured the audience. In myself, it excited feelings with which music had long ceased to inspire me: it was impossible to restrain them. It may seem strange that in her latter years she should please me more than in the most brilliant part of her career. But so it was; and I now found out that,

although at that time I liked her less than some of her predecessors, I now liked her better than most of her successors. The last notes I ever heard from her were in my own house, accompanying herself on the pianoforte, in some beautiful little Italian canzonets. In person she is grown large, but still very handsome, with all her fine expression of countenance, and few or no marks of age. She had with her a daughter, now married, who sang a little, but inherited neither her mother's voice nor talents. I have since heard of her from Florence, near which town she resides, and I hope will long do so in health and happiness.

I resume my account of the Opera, collected chiefly from report, and such other information as I have been able, not without some difficulty, to obtain. I shall rarely speak from my own knowledge; when I do so, it will be more in detail, and noticed accordingly.

I left off at Sontag's arrival, in 1828. She was the great attraction of that season, and

continued in equal favour during a second, after which she quitted England, and soon after the profession, on her marriage with a man of rank in Holland.

When Pasta went away, her place was filled (in 1829) by Madame Malibran, who had made so very successful a début here as Mademoiselle Garcia, then went to America and married. After a very few years she returned to Europe, re-appeared on the stage under her new name, and soon gained the top of her profession. This had been foretold by Velluti, when she sung a secondary part in the opera with him. She then showed high talents, which he said had only to be matured by good tuition and practice (aided by abstaining awhile from public singing above her growing powers), to render her a first-rate performer. Such she is now considered in every country she has visited. Here she made a great impression, and immediately rose to the highest favour. I went to hear her once in Semiramide; but it seems I was

unlucky in my choice, as all agree that in that part she is inferior to her rival Pasta, not having quite her force, nor as much majesty in her action or appearance. In characters of less energy she is much better, and best of all in the comic opera. She even condescended, in one instance, to make herself a *buffa caricata*, taking the third and least important part in Cimarosa's Matrimonio Segreto, that of an old woman (the Mrs. Heidelberg of the Clandestine Marriage), generally acted by the lowest singer of the company. From an insignificant character she raised it to a prominent one, and very greatly added to the effect of that excellent opera, which was then performed admirably throughout. In Semiramide, when I saw it, the principal male character, that of Arsace, was acted by Pisaroni, a singer of the first excellence, possessing the finest contralto voice of almost any female ever heard; but she was, unfortunately, one of the plainest, and could never appear in the dress of her sex. She was fully conscious of this great

disadvantage, and always acted male parts; nor would, as I have heard, accept an engagement till she had prepared her employers for the deformity they would see. To those who only listened, she gave unqualified satisfaction, for her singing was perfect. She remained here only one season.

The opera of Semiramide is considered, by Rossini's admirers, as one of his best, and there are fine pieces in it; but I own it wearied me exceedingly by its extreme length, not only of the whole as a drama, but of the individual pieces, some of which seemed to me as if they would never end. These tedious compositions completely exhaust my attention, till I am insensible of their beauties. Yet on that occasion this long opera was not thought sufficient for the evening's amusement, for it was followed by one act of the Barbiere, in which Sontag performed. Wearied as I was I could not help staying a part of it, to hear her sing Rode's Variations, which she did with astonishing neatness and accuracy; but after

all, it is an instrumental, not a vocal, piece of music. I had seen once before the last part of Semiramide, little more than one scene, performed by Pasta and Velluti, who, though not regularly engaged, came forward on one particular night, for one of those strange medley performances now much in vogue. She certainly acted better than Malibran, he less well than Pisaroni. But the end of the opera (in a theatrical point of view) is not so good as either Bianchi's, acted by Banti, or Portogallo's, by Catalani. The death of the heroine is not nearly so well managed, and does not give so much opportunity for the display of good acting. Two new male singers made their first appearance this year, Donzelli, a tenor of celebrity in Italy, with a powerful voice, which he did not modulate well, and Lablache, a bass of uncommon force and power. His voice was not only of deeper compass than almost any ever heard, but when he chose, absolutely *stentorian*, and he was also gigantic in his person; yet when he moderated its

extraordinary strength, he sung pleasingly and well. He was a most excellent actor, especially in comic operas, in which he was, as I am told, as highly diverting as any of the most laughable comedians.

It is impossible for me to speak in any detail or regular order of the subsequent seasons. I can give little more than the names of a good many performers successively engaged, and of the very few new operas brought out of late years. Whenever Pasta or Malibran were here, as they generally were alternately, for a part, at least, of the season, the opera was successful. Other prima donnas came who were either little liked, or totally failed. Among these were a Mademoiselle Blasis, and a Madame Meric Lalande, both French women, and too French in their singing to give much pleasure. In one season there was no good effective prima donna at the opening, and after some unsuccessful trials, the manager engaged, for a few nights, till Pasta should arrive, Mrs. Wood (formerly

Miss Paton), whose powers were equal to the situation, but she did not understand the language she sung; a great disadvantage, which, however, her knowledge of the stage enabled her to overcome with tolerable success. The first tenor that appeared that year was David, son of the excellent singer who was here just forty years before. The younger did not equal his father, but had enjoyed great reputation in Italy. When he came to this country he was *passé*, and his voice become so unsteady that he was obliged to disguise its defects by superfluity of ornaments and passages; but he had always been too florid a singer. An opera in which he performed with Mrs. Wood, was L'Ultimo Giorno di Pompei, by Pacini, a very feeble composer.

When Pasta came, later in the year, she produced Anna Bolena, an opera by Donizetti, in which another tenor made his appearance, Rubini, who soon became, and still continues, a great favourite. He possesses

one of the sweetest of voices, of great flexibility, and is an excellent singer, but too fond of the over-florid style now so much in fashion. Lablache also performed in this opera. I heard them all three at a private concert sing some of the pieces from it, as a kind of trial, preparatory to bringing it out for Pasta's benefit. They did not please me, being of a forced, unnatural style; but on the stage Pasta's very fine acting, almost horrific in the last scene, obtained some success to this opera. Another she performed was La Somnambula, by Bellini, who has composed a great deal of music expressly for Rubini, whom I heard sing very beautifully one of his songs from Il Pirata at the concert above mentioned. In the last opera both those performers sung and acted to perfection.

The year 1832 (at which I am now arrived) was less successful, though it had more variety than any other in this period. A new manager had undertaken the opera, and he managed ill both for himself and the public.

It opened with a moderate company, the first singer of which was Madame de Meric, not a great, but far from an unpleasing performer. She was a clever actress, was possessed of a pretty good voice, and considerable versatility of talent, rendering her very useful, as she sung in serious or comic operas, first parts or second, and in any language. While in this country she performed in Italian, German, French, and English, and could have done so equally well in Spanish, had it been required. I saw her several times in German only. Two prima donnas came later in the year, neither of whom gave any satisfaction. These were Grisi and Tosi, and there was also Mariani, the rival of Pisaroni in voice, singing, and ugliness, like her, performing only male characters. In the two first qualities she was certainly her inferior, in the last it was difficult to know to which the preference should be given. I was induced, unfortunately, to go one night to see Gli Arabi nelle Gallie, a very poor opera by Pacini, acted by Grisi and

Mariani, a very indifferent tenor named Winter, and a bass no better. On the whole, I never hardly, in my long experience, witnessed a performance so *mediocre* in every respect. The other first woman, Tosi, had been greatly admired in Italy, but she was *passée*, and her voice grown thin and uncertain in its intonation. She had been a handsome woman. But she was not at all liked, and acted only a very few nights, having very soon quarrelled with the manager, and broken her engagement. I heard her once, at a private concert, as also Mariani, which latter had certainly a good voice, and was reckoned a good singer.

The Italian opera being thus unsuccessful, the manager tried the experiment of procuring a German company of singers, and bringing out the operas of the best composers in that language. This novelty succeeded beyond expectation: the German opera became the rage, and the Italian sunk into insignificance. This company opened with Der Freyschütz,

which had for many years been known in translation, and was a great favourite in this country. Meric performed the first part in it. The real first woman did not appear till the second opera, when Beethoven's Fidelio was produced for the début of Madame Schroeder Devrient. She was indeed a very superior performer, with a voice less sweet perhaps than powerful, capable of great exertion and strong expression. She was a capital actress (considered in Germany as by far the best in opera, as is her mother, Madame Schroeder, in tragedy), and one of the most striking and effective performers I ever saw. Though by no means a pretty woman, and without marked features, such as produce most effect on the stage, she had the power of great expression and change of countenance. In Fidelio she was throughout in male attire. I was present at her first appearance, and so charmed by her performance that I not only went to see that opera a second time, but never failed

afterwards going to hear, once at least, every other that was acted during that season and the next. The whole opera was throughout well sung and well acted, by the tenor Haitzinger, who had a very beautiful voice, very much like in tone, and almost equal, to Tramezzani's; a bass named Pellegrini, and the second woman Schneider. But it was in the chorusses especially, that the excellence of the German singers was most displayed. These were performed in a manner quite new to an English audience. Those in the Freyschütz had made a most favourable impression, from the perceptible difference from all former performances of them. Those in Fidelio were still finer; especially one of prisoners, so strikingly fine, and well acted as well as sung, that it was always repeated every night. The cause of this greater excellence is the very superior knowledge of music possessed by the Germans, who study it more scientifically than any other nation. Nobody who has not

heard the chorusses of Weber, Beethoven, and other great composers, sung by native performers, can have an idea of their perfection.

In the course of the season Don Giovanni also was acted, Devrient taking the part of Donna Anna, Meric, Donna Elvira, and Schneider, Zerlina. Another opera brought forth was Macbeth, taken from our tragedy, but very much altered; the music was composed by Chelard, the conductor of the orchestra; it was extravagant and not pleasing. Meric sung one of the most cramped and difficult songs I ever heard, with astonishing truth and precision; it was entirely devoid of melody or beauty. Devrient's Lady Macbeth was a very fine piece of acting, particularly in the sleeping scene, to which she gave a novel though natural effect. But the opera did not please.

In the following year the German company was transferred to Covent Garden Theatre, where I saw the Zauberflöte, and Weber's fine opera of Euryanthe, which called forth all Devrient's powers. She was always ex-

cellent, and enthusiastically applauded; but was less well supported that year, all the other performers being new except Haitzinger. German operas were again attempted a third season at the Opera house, but Devrient would not come over, and they totally failed after a few nights, her successors being below mediocrity.

Another experiment, in the year 1832, was bringing over a company of French singers from Paris, for the purpose of performing Mayerbeer's opera of Robert le Diable. They were the same that acted it when it first came out, consisting of Madame Damoreau, who had made her début in this country about ten years before in the Italian opera under the name of Cinti (not her real name, but one *Italianized* from the French); Nourrit, the first tenor; and Le Vasseur, first bass of the opera at Paris. The latter, I believe, is the person of that name who had sung here two or three seasons when the opera was at its worst. Meric also sung in it. Cinti when she was here before was

very young, had a good voice, and was a promising singer, but not then fit for first characters, into which she was put by the interest of some injudicious friends, who wished to set her up against Camporese and Ronzi, but she was unable to compete with them. On her return to Paris, she continued to sing at the Italian theatre there, till induced to transfer her services to the *grand opera* at which her husband Damoreau is a singer. But she would do so only on condition of choosing the operas and parts she should perform; and by her means, a very great change has taken place in the national opera, where good music may now be heard, such as will please other ears besides French; and the former horrible screamings and howlings are nearly exploded. It would be happy if the alteration in theatrical performances had stopped here; but the French stage, once the pattern of decency and propriety, is now become a school for profaneness and immorality; the most sacred

subjects are exhibited, the most indecent exposed, almost without disguise, in operas, melodramas, and ballets. Of this perverted style is Robert le Diable; yet I am sorry to say it had been translated and produced at our theatres. I saw it acted at Covent Garden, and never did I see a more disagreeable or disgusting performance; the sight of the resurrection of a whole convent of nuns, who rise from their graves, and begin dancing like so many bacchantes, is revolting; and a sacred service in a church, accompanied by an organ on the stage, not very decorous. Neither does the music of Mayerbeer compensate for a fable which is a tissue of nonsense and improbability. Of course I was not tempted to hear it again in its original form, and it did credit to the taste of the English public that it was not endured at the Opera house, and was acted only a very few nights.

This speculative experimental season did not prove fortunate. Malibran came towards

its close; and also a new bass, Tamburini, whose voice is sweet and flexible in an uncommon degree, and who is an excellent singer. I heard him once in a concert. These good performers arrived too late to repair the losses; the receipts never covered the expenses, the singers did not get their salaries, and the manager became a bankrupt.

In the ensuing year, the former lessee ventured again to take the Opera house, and still continues to be its manager. Of 1833 little is to be said, although the company was unusually strong, with Pasta first, and afterwards Malibran at its head, and with all the male singers, except Lablache, who had sung in several of the previous seasons.

That which has just concluded begun ill, for want of a prima donna, with the signal failure of two wretched substitutes who could not be borne. But Caradori, happening to be in England, was engaged for a limited time, and carried on the operas with tolerable success till the arrival of the first woman who

was expected. This was Giulietta Grisi, younger sister of the former singer of that name, but very much superior to her in all respects, combining every requisite for the situation; handsome person, sweet yet powerful voice, considerable execution, and still more expression; she is an excellent singer, and excellent actress; in short is described to be as nearly perfect as possible, and is almost a greater favourite than even Pasta or Malibran. The male performers were again Rubini and Tamburini, with Zuchelli, Curioni, and a new tenor named Ivanhoff, a Russian by birth, who has studied in Italy, has a very beautiful voice, and chaste simple style of singing, but little execution. The only novelty produced this season was Rossini's opera, called L' Assedio di Corinto, new indeed in England, but not so in Italy, where it was first acted a dozen years ago as Maometto Secondo, but totally failed. With some slight changes it has been brought out here under another name. It has in it

but little originality, though a great deal of noise; a siege and Turkish music giving ample scope for the brass instruments. The rest have been only eternal repetitions of the old operas, hacknied by every singer in every season, till it is a wonder they can be listened to any longer. The changes have been rung on the Gazza Ladra, the Barbiere, Semiramide, and others, favourites in their novelty, but heard even to satiety. Grisi has also ventured on two of Pasta's best characters, Anna Bolena and La Somnambula, which was thought bold, but she succeeded completely in both; the latter particularly is considered as her chef-d'œuvre. I now regret that I did not go to the opera to hear all thèse excellent singers in their proper place, as I shall unfortunately have to mention them in another, where they were entirely out of their element, and be forced to speak of them in a very different manner.

The new operas during this last period have been fewer than in any other of equal

length, and those few of less merit. Besides those already noticed, there have appeared some so indifferent as to be speedily withdrawn; L' Esule di Roma, by Donizetti; Romeo e Giulietta, by Vaccaj; and perhaps one or two more. Bellini's Pirata and Somnambula are the only tolerably good ones, and he is the best of the present composers. All the rest, Mercadante, Pacini, Coccia, &c., either feebly imitate Rossini, or if they attempt originality, run into extravagances greater than those of the master of the new school, and in both instances are of course inferior. It is greatly to be lamented by all lovers of music that so little good is now composed, and that genius, as well as taste, appear to be extinct in Italy. The modern German composers are decidedly better than the Italian, and even French have latterly produced works which may claim precedence over them. Let us hope, for the credit of England, and to retrieve our character of being an unmusical nation, that the encourage-

ment now held out to native talent in the line of composition may eventually be attended with success; and that the patriotic proprietor of the English Opera house may be able to elicit any latent sparks of genius that exist among the musicians of our own country.*

I proceed now to the principal subject that induced me again to resume my pen.

* A modern work has just come to my hands, entitled *Diary of an Ennuyée*, by Mrs. JAMIESON, in which I have found opinions on the subject of Rossini and his imitators, so exactly coinciding with my own, that I could wish to subjoin them: but they are too long for insertion, and I will not injure them by garbled extracts. Indeed it would be only a repetition of what has been already said, almost in the same words. After describing in strong terms the present *perverted* and *diseased* taste, the Author exclaims, *Must it be ever thus?* I once hoped it would not. Now I begin to fear that this, like many other miscalled *improvements*, has done a mischief not easy to be repaired; and that a taste so diseased cannot without much difficulty be cured.

SECTION XI.

1834.

Musical Festival in Westminster Abbey—Conclusion.

HAVING been present at most of the celebrated performances in Westminster Abbey half a century ago, I was exceedingly curious and anxious to attend those which have lately taken place in imitation of them, and vied with them in magnitude and grandeur. I went to all the concerts, four in number, with a strong recollection of the original from which they were copied, and with the determination of comparing minutely and impartially the present with the past. I will freely confess that my expectation was not raised so high as to imagine I should find them equal, far less superior, to the last, particularly as regarded the principal vocal parts of the performances.

There are not now to be found singers of such excellence as then existed, and of the most eminent of the present day, few are now in England. The instrumental department was likely to be better filled, as also the choral. Those parts, therefore, I felt confident would be more effectively performed, nor was I much disappointed. The good singers for solo parts were few in number, not one transcendently excellent, and those whom it was possible to collect were not employed as much, or as advantageously as they might have been. I keep more particular observations for their proper place in the course of the following details, and shall make them fully, and without reserve.

This Festival, as I have said, was in professed imitation of the commemoration of Handel, exactly fifty years ago, in the year 1784, performances similar to which were repeated in 1785, 86, and 87. The King's illness then interrupted them for two years, but they were resumed in 1790, and 1791,

which was the last. Of these, some description was given before, but it was necessarily short, being written many years after they took place, and without any memoranda or documents to refer to. I now regret it was not fuller, that a closer comparison might be made between them and the present, of which it is my intention to speak at greater length.

These, like the former, were given under the immediate patronage of their Majesties, who honoured all the four concerts with their presence. These were also under the management of a committee of eight, chiefly directors of the ancient concerts, with a numerous sub-committee of professional men, who, I believe, were not much (if at all) consulted; but they rendered essential service in another way. The conductor of the music was Sir George Smart, on whom lay the chief, if not the sole, charge of selection and arrangement. To these, the only real managers, were added between fifty and sixty names, with the title of *presidents*. Of that number I had the

honour to be one; but so far from having any allotted department over which to preside, we were neither taken into counsel, nor informed of any thing whatever, nor had any duties to perform. Yet we too were not without our utility, for to us were granted reserved places at double the price of the open seats, and we were not restricted as to the number for which we might apply. The eagerness of the public to be present at the performances, and the attraction of a secure place were so great, that the demand for them exceeded all expectation and belief, so that at least two-thirds of the Abbey were filled with the holders of tickets at two guineas instead of one. A few days before the performances any money might have been had for a seat. I have heard as much as ten guineas were offered. For the rehearsals, of which the tickets were half-a-guinea, above double the price was in many instances paid for admission. The whole of the middle aisle, and the front benches in the sides both below and in the

galleries, were appropriated to the presidents' tickets, each of which bearing a number corresponding to the seat reserved for it, the possessors of them would have had not the slightest difficulty in finding each his own place, even had they not been guided by the gentlemen of the sub-committee, who acted as stewards, and conducted every individual to his proper seat. The arrangement was incomparable; there was neither hurry, crowd, nor confusion; the thousands of the audiences arrived, were placed, and departed with greater facility than at any public place, however small. The plan was admirably contrived, and perfectly carried into effect; the excellent regulations laid down being strictly observed, and so clear they could not be mistaken. Equal good order was observed without, and the several lines of carriages reached the door appointed for their setting down without danger or difficulty.

The fitting up of the Abbey on this occasion was very similar to what it was on the former,

with some deviations, not perhaps for the better. The King's gallery occupied, as before, the eastern end of the nave, but it was placed lower, and instead of ranging with the side galleries, was elevated but a few steps above the floor of the middle aisle, thereby breaking in upon the regular lines and levels so essential to the beauty and symmetry of architecture. By this position it did not, as formerly, conceal the organ of the choir, which partially appeared above it; half of the pipes being seen, while the other half was sunk below, had a very bad effect on entering at the western end. The whole of that structure seemed crushed and depressed, and would have looked still worse had not other galleries been added over it in consequence of the increasing demand for places as the time of the performances approached. These upper seats ranged with the sides, and what was resorted to as a convenience became an improvement to the general appearance. The royal closet was splendidly decorated, and covered inside and out with crimson and gold

draperies. On each side of the King's tribune sat the suite of their Majesties, and immediately below it the directors. On the right of the latter was a box for the Bishops, on the left for the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. Thus far it was just the same as at the commemoration; but there were not, as then, boxes beneath these for the families and friends of the directors on one side, and of the chapter on the other. The latter, therefore, lost their privilege and accommodation: but the directors had places reserved elsewhere. The side galleries projected too much before the pillars, for though many seats were gained by it, they seemed to narrow the middle aisle. The fronts of them were also hung with crimson. The effect of the whole was gorgeous, indeed too much so, as not in accordance with the architecture of the Abbey. They were before covered with paper and gothic ornaments, much more appropriate to the building, lighter in appearance, and more favourable to the sound, which must have been considerably deadened by so much dra-

pery. When the whole space was filled, it had altogether a fine effect, though less so than before, from the change that has taken place in dress, particularly that of the ladies. Then they all came in full dress; now the permission, or rather the direction, to wear morning costume, detracted much from the grandeur of the spectacle; the King, his suite, and the directors, were all dressed in splendid uniforms. The female singers, following the example of the audience, appeared in dishabille, hardly respectful in presence of their Majesties.

The orchestra occupied, as before, the west end; but several changes were made in its arrangement, which certainly were not improvements either to the look or to the effect of the music. A large organ was erected, in front of, and round which the instrumental performers were placed. But they were much concealed by desks, gaudily ornamented with gold, which dazzled the eye unpleasantly, and cast the players on the several instruments into so dark a shade they

were scarcely visible. The order too in which they were placed was different, and the violoncellos, instead of occupying conspicuous front seats, were almost out of sight. The singular and pleasing effect before remarked, of the bows moving simultaneously like a piece of mechanism, was now quite lost. The principal vocal performers of course occupied the front row. Behind them formerly sat all the female singers of the chorus on steps, raised in a semi-circular form, so that they were not only distinctly heard, but seen. On each side, seats rising in regular gradation into the side aisles were allotted to the male part of the chorus, without any interruption or separation. But now there was not room enough left for such an arrangement, the front of the orchestra being straight, instead of projecting considerably in the centre; so that all the choral performers, female as well as male, were driven farther back behind the pillars, and quite parted from the central part of the orchestra by a bar or low partition. This was an obvious and perceptible disadvantage, placing

them so much out of sight, and intercepting the sound of the voices. The consequence was, that the chorusses failed in some measure of their effect, and were not so powerful as they would otherwise have been. Yet the total number of the band was larger than in 1784; but the instrumental and vocal performers were in different proportions: then the former predominated, now the latter. The voices too were differently combined. I subjoin the numbers that they may be compared together, and leave to better judges to decide which combination was likely to produce the best effect.*

	1784.		1834.	
* Instruments		274		222
Voices.				
Cantos	60		124	
Altos	46		68	
Tenors	83		64	
Basses	84		100	
		273		356
Total		547		578

Total in 1785—616: 1786—741: 1791—above 1000.

The greatest difference however in the orchestra arose from the new system introduced in the conducting and leading of the band. It has been mentioned before, that at all the former concerts in the Abbey, Mr. Bates both played the organ, and was sole conductor; also, that Cramer was the only leader. Now a different plan was adopted, Sir George Smart conducted, not playing himself, but beating time with a *bâton*. This method has long been pursued abroad, but was not introduced into this country till very lately. Large orchestras in Italy and Germany are so conducted; and in France it is universal, and followed not only at their *grand opéra*, (where they are so proud of their *premier coup d'archet*), but in the smallest theatres, with the smallest band, not the commonest ballad or vaudeville are ever sung without a *bâton*. On my first going there (above fifty years ago) I was exceedingly struck with this (to me) novel fashion, and thought the performers must be very bad musicians, who

could not be kept in time without that noisy accompaniment. One necessary consequence of this foreign adoption, was the change above alluded to in the arrangement of the orchestra. Sir George Smart was placed at a desk nearly where the keys of the organ were before. The organist was hid by a screen, and I long wondered how he and the conductor could see or communicate with each other; but I learned afterwards that by a new and ingenious contrivance, the keys of the organ were turned round, so that the player sat with his back to the instrument and facing the conductor, who as before looked towards it. In a band so managed, the conductor is *every thing*, the leader *nobody*, the first fiddle being as much under the control of the *bâton* as the last. On this occasion therefore, the leader, instead of being the most conspicuous person, was not visible. I sought in vain to find him, he being placed on one side, behind his desk, like all the inferior performers. Sir George Smart alone was conspicuous, and he was

rendered more so by an opening left in the centre of the front seat, for no imaginable reason but to exhibit the conductor's back to all the auditors. In that central point formerly sat MADAME MARA: the gap recalled her to the minds of those who remembered her there, and seemed to be left vacant because nobody was worthy to fill her seat: there was indeed no one. I will not pretend to say which method is the best, the old or the new, professing my ignorance of instrumental performances, and orchestral effects. I shall therefore refer my readers to a high authority, which, even at this distance of time, and amidst all the changes that have taken place in music, must still have its due weight. I think few will even now presume to dispute the science, the judgment, the taste, of Dr. Burney. He it is who thus expresses himself on this subject in his account of the Commemoration of Handel, written and published by the command of George the Third.

" Foreigners, particularly the French, must

be much astonished at so numerous a band, moving in such exact measure, without the assistance of a Coryphæus to beat time, either with a roll of paper, or a noisy *bâton* or truncheon. Rousseau says, that the more time is beaten the less it is kept; and it is certain that when the measure is broken, the fury of the musical general, or director, increasing with the disorder and confusion of his troops, he becomes more violent, and his strokes and gesticulations more ridiculous in proportion to their disorder."

Dr. Burney here introduces a curious anecdote of the famous French musician, Lulli, who killed himself with his own bâton. In the violence of his gesticulation, he hit his foot so hard a blow that he died of the consequences of it. The doctor then proceeds:

"As this commemoration is not only the first instance of a band of such magnitude being assembled together, but of any band at all numerous performing in a similar situation

without the assistance of a *manu-ductor* to regulate the measure, the performances in Westminster Abbey may be safely pronounced no less remarkable for the multiplicity of voices and instruments employed, than for accuracy and precision. When all the wheels of that huge machine, the Orchestra, were in motion, the effect resembled clock-work in every thing but want of feeling and expression. And as the power of gravity and attraction in bodies is proportioned to their mass and density, so it seems as if the magnitude of this band had commanded and impelled adhesion and obedience beyond that of any inferior force. The pulsations in every limb, and ramifications of veins and arteries in an animal could not be more reciprocal, more under the regulations of the heart, than the members of this body of musicians, under that of the conductor and leader. The totality of sound seemed to proceed from one voice and one instrument ; and its powers produced, not only new and exquisite sensations in

judges and lovers of the art, but were felt by those who never received pleasure from music before. These effects, which will be long remembered by the present public, perhaps to the disadvantage of all other choral performances, run the risk of being doubted by all but those who heard them, and the present description of being pronounced fabulous, if it should survive the present generation."

"Nothing discovered the admirable discipline of the band, and unwearied and determined attention of the audience so much as the *pauses*, which are so frequent in Handel's music; for these were so unanimously calculated and measured, that no platoon, or single cannon was ever fired with more exact precision or unity of effect than that with which the whole phalanx of this multitudinous band resumed its work after all the sudden, and usually unlimited, cessations of sound, commonly called *pause*."

The musical reader will excuse, or rather

thank me for laying before him such long extracts from so eminent a musician and author. I have only one remark to make upon them. If *perfection* was attained by the old system, what more could be accomplished by the new?

That I may not have occasion to return again to Dr. Burney's book, I will insert here some other passages from it (though perhaps they would find a better place hereafter), descriptive of the effects that wonderful band produced, for the accuracy of which I can vouch from ocular demonstration, as well as from the feelings I myself experienced.

"The effects indeed upon many were such as modern times have never before experienced. The *choral* power of harmonical combinations affected some to tears and fainting; while others were melted and enwrapt by the exquisite sweetness of *single sounds*. The universal rapture visible in the countenances of this uncommonly numerous and splendid audience during the whole time that

Madame Mara was performing the very affecting air, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," exceeded every silent expression of delight from music which I had ever before observed. Her power over the sensibility of the audience seemed equal to that of Mrs. Siddons. There was no eye within my view which did not

"'Silently a gentle tear let fall.'"

"Nor, though long hacknied in music, did I feel myself made

"'Of stronger earth than others.'"

"At the end of her performance of this air, the audience seemed bursting with applause, for which the place allowed of no decorous means of uttering."

On this description, not in the least exaggerated, I am sorry to observe that in the present instance I neither witnessed nor experienced any similar feelings. I saw no tears,

no faintings; nor did that general thrill pervade the hearers which then was manifested by signs so unequivocal. Admiration was expressed with calmness and moderation, without excitement, and without emotion.

It is difficult to account for it, but certain it is, that the bursts of the noble and sublime chorusses of Handel (for to his alone I confine that power) failed to electrify the audience in the manner and to the degree they did at the former performances, when they frequently were absolutely startling, and felt through every nerve. One of the most marked failures occurred in the very beginning. The burst of "Light" in the first chorus of the Creation, was so comparatively feeble to what I had always heard it before, that my attention, which happened to be attracted elsewhere at the moment, was not roused by the sudden crash it ought to have produced. It disappointed all. That there should be inequalities in the performances is not surprising, and a reason may be given why it should be so;

for whereas, on the former occasion Mr. Bates, himself a host, was the sole organist, and Cramer sole leader, *seven* organists and *five* leaders were now employed. This arrangement was obviously meant to afford an opportunity to performers of celebrity for displaying their talents; but it was injudicious, for it is clear that the habit of playing together is a great advantage even to the best, which was discernible in the performance of the Messiah, wherein were engaged Mr. W. Knyvett and Mr. Francis Cramer (the worthy son of his talented father, and quite fit to fill his place) who both always take the lead in the concerts of ancient music, and are well acquainted with each other. On the first day the organ, large and powerful as it was, was not audible: it might almost as well have been silent. It was not till the latter part of the second concert, when Mr. Turle, the organist of the Abbey, took his seat at it, and accompanied Israel in Egypt, that it was heard with proper effect. Then, indeed, its deep tones were drawn forth

and its full chords filled up the harmony and completely gratified the ear. The difference was striking. In what has been said, no reflection is intended to be cast on the other organists, who probably are all men of eminence. Dr. Crotch, who played part of the third day, is well known to be so. But all cannot be equal, and every player has a style, a mannerism, if I may so call it, of his own, which may not suit all occasions, or every kind of music. Besides, there is another thing to be taken into consideration. One good violin or piano-forte is very like another, and all can be played alike. It is not so with that stupendous and complicated piece of mechanism the organ. No two may to an exactness be the same. The touch, the pedals, the stops may vary according to the skill or fancy of the builder; and it is almost necessary for the organist, especially on such an occasion, to be a little accustomed to the individual instrument he is to play. Therefore one organist, knowing it well, would have been much better

than more. The number of leaders was of less importance, since by the new system they are all subject to the controul of the *bâton*. The failure in the effect of some of the chorusses may perhaps be partly attributed to this cause, partly to some slight difference in expression, however trifling, and some diminution of the spirit and energy formerly displayed. Nevertheless, the choral part of the performances was the best, and gave more general, if not unqualified, satisfaction, than any other.

It is obvious that these remarks apply only to the chorusses of Handel, which alone can be brought into comparison with the original performances, when the music of no other composer was allowed to be performed. On this occasion, compositions of various masters were introduced, and selections given from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and others of celebrity. I am not, nor ever was, a professed or exclusive *Handelian*, though I always highly admired his sacred works, and think

them more truly sublime than those of any other master whatever; but I never wish to hear his music out of a church. Haydn and Mozart have always been greater favourites with me, and delighted me more frequently, their music being better adapted for general use, as of a less solemn and austere character. I therefore was glad of the opportunity of hearing some of their best sacred compositions so performed, and promised myself great pleasure from the variety they would afford. But I was much disappointed, and the intermixture was (to me at least) far from agreeable. Their styles are so different from Handel's, they do not accord together, and will not bear *juxta-position*. It produces contrasts too striking, transitions too abrupt; and I now very much agree in opinion with some old frequenters of the ancient concerts, that the joining them so closely together is disadvantageous to both. I can have no hesitation in giving the preference over them all to Handel on an occasion like the present, and in such a

place. The merits of the other three masters above named are universally known, and they are justly esteemed as of the greatest excellence. Of the two first I have had occasion before to express my admiration; with Beethoven I am but little acquainted. I shall notice their compositions now performed, when I give somewhat in detail an account of the selections made for the several concerts with which it is my intention to conclude.

But I must first make mention of the principal vocal performers employed: and this is the least agreeable part of the task I have imposed upon myself, for it is that to which the least praise can be given; and except in a very few instances I cannot bestow on their individual exertions very high commendations. But there *are* exceptions, and I heartily wish the arrangements made in the allotment of the parts had made them, as they might have been, more numerous.

Before I name the leading singers, I must in fairness premise, that the Directors of the

Festival were unlucky in having so few of great excellence to choose from, and that they engaged all whom it was possible (and more than it was necessary) to procure. Still there was not one female fit to be what the Italians call *prima donna assoluta*, no Mara, to whom all the chief songs would of course have been assigned. Her part therefore was distributed amongst many. Perhaps there is not one in Europe (since Catalani's retirement) equal to filling her place, except Pasta and Malibran, who could not be got; although the latter came to England on some other pretence, on the very week of the festival, and no doubt wished to perform at it. I believe indeed she offered her services, but demanded terms so exorbitant and unreasonable that it was impossible to accede to them, and the Directors were perfectly justified in rejecting her; upon which she left the country immediately to go to Milan, where she is engaged on terms quite incredible.

As therefore there was no super-eminent

female singer, I shall depart from the usual courtesy of giving precedence to the ladies, and begin my enumeration with one who was decidedly the most prominent amongst the vocalists. I mean Mr. Braham, who on this occasion surpassed himself, and whose performance was really quite surprising. He has long been at the head of his profession as an English singer, so long, that it is marvellous he can be so still. He is now far advanced in life, and it is almost beyond my recollection when I first heard him sing as a boy. Yet he retains in their full extent all his powers, without diminution or decay. His voice is just what it was in his prime: it is become neither weak, nor husky, nor tremulous, but filled with its volume all the vast space with the finest effect. His singing too was most excellent. In my first account of him, I gave him credit for the ability always to sing well, and lamented his occasional deviations from a good style. No such fault could now be found. He now sung with the most perfect taste and judg-

ment throughout. Nothing in particular could be finer than his delivery of the very beautiful recitative in Jephthah, "Deeper and deeper still," as also of that which opens the Messiah, "Comfort ye my people."

I cannot help introducing here a few observations upon English recitative, and I do so in this place that they may be *general*, and that I may not be under the necessity of making particular applications hereafter. Recitative is not congenial to the English language, and very few purely English singers understand it. Most of them, especially the female, fall into a great error respecting it. They seem to consider it as an *air*, and interlard it with inappropriate graces, uniformly giving it in a drawling indistinct manner, spiritless and insipid, which totally mars its effect. The besetting sin of most English singers is, that indistinctness of pronunciation which even in a song is one of the greatest blemishes, and in recitative is still more faulty. The Italians never talk of *singing* it, but call it *reciting*,

and so it is and ought to be. It is not *melody*, it is *noted declamation;* and the first object is, not to warble it into an air, but to deliver the words with distinct articulation, sensible expression, proper emphasis, and with just *punctuation*, if I may so call the necessary short pauses for taking breath, which are like so many commas. In short, it should be assimilated as nearly as possible to good declamation. To lengthen it out by slow delivery is as wearisome as the dull recitation of a bad actor, orator, or reader. Those who wish to avoid these defects, could not have a better lesson than from Mr. Braham.

To return from this digression, the introduction of which will be accounted for by those who remarked some passages in the course of the performances.

The first female performer I shall mention, as incontestibly the best, is Madame Caradori, of whom my opinion has been given so fully before, that it is unnecessary to add more than that she sang with her usual excellence,

and was well heard, although it was feared her voice would not be strong enough for so large a space. This was by no means the case; she gave universal satisfaction, but was employed much too little, having only three songs allotted to her in the course of all the concerts.

The next place must be given to Miss Stephens, who was so long the reigning favourite of the public, both on the stage and in concerts. She has for some time wholly retired from the former, and has seldom been heard at the latter. Her voice has lately much diminished in power, of which it would appear she is sensible; but she was induced to come forward again on this occasion, and in the present dearth of great performers, she was an acquisition. She must not, however, be judged by what she *was*, but what she *is*. It would be flattery to say she sung as well as she formerly did, the change in her voice made that impossible, as it has lost in extent as well as power; but when she performed

songs of moderate compass, and easy execution, she was still very agreeable, and left little to be desired. When obliged, as she injudiciously was, to attempt others of a higher description, she certainly failed, and could not give them with sufficient force.

The third in order was Madame Stockhausen, a very good singer and musician, but hardly strong enough for the higher styles of music. She has gained great favour here, by the exquisite taste and expression with which she sings national Swiss airs, than which (as I am told) nothing can be more delightful. Her skill and science enable her, however, to sing always well.

The only other female singer deserving notice is Mrs. W. Knyvett, who is a very good *second*, and much liked at the ancient concerts, having been educated in that school, and almost, if not entirely, devoted to that style exclusively.

But besides these, there appeared on the list of PRINCIPAL VOCAL PERFORMERS no less

than *fifteen* others, the names of most of whom were never heard of before, and very few are likely to be heard of again, or rise to fame. I will not here insert any of them. Of this very large number three or four were singers belonging to the play-houses, of no great note. One only of them is even there considered as a first singer. It is notorious that many who do tolerably well on the stage, are not qualified to be heard off of it; still less are fit for sacred music. It is not above once in a century that there arises a Billington. The rest, or the greater part of them, are, or were, pupils of the new Academy of Music, which being designed to profit largely by this Festival (whether or not it is an institution strictly to be termed *charitable*, and therefore entitled to any share of the gains, I will not here discuss), it was probably thought right to bring forward its *élèves*, to show what it has accomplished. But nothing could be more ill-judged. Among so many young women there certainly were some fresh and

sweet voices, but not one finished singer. It would not only be useless, but impossible, to particularise them; such an equality of mediocrity pervaded the whole, that it would indeed be difficult to discriminate, or range them according to the shades of greater or less talent they displayed. Their being so exhibited could be of no advantage to themselves, and still less to the academy, by showing it had no better singers to produce. In instrumental music that school has been much more successful, and sent out scholars of great promise. Many are now performing on various instruments who already hold a distinguished place in their profession, and will certainly, in time, rise to the highest rank in it. If these young vocalists gained little reputation, they certainly added but little to the pleasure of their hearers, who did not pay so highly to hear scholars and learners; and I am confident I speak the sentiments of a large majority of the audiences, when I say they would infinitely have preferred hearing the

best singers often to such a variety of inferiors once. Numbers do not make amends for want of excellence. There appeared great partiality and favouritism throughout the arrangement, as will be seen when I come to examine the selections.

In the male department too the singers were numerous and various. Some, as Messrs. Vaughan and Bellamy, long known to the public, and grown old in their service, but not like Braham, so happy as to have retained their powers. Others, comparatively young, and in their prime, though less known, and more seldom heard, deserve particular notice, such as Messrs. Sapio and E. Seguin; the former having a beautiful tenor voice, the other, one of the best basses I ever heard; both are excellent singers, and they were universally liked; yet, strange to say, they were allowed to sing but once, though they might, or rather *ought*, to have had a leading part in all the concerts. Mr. H. Phillips, who is also a good bass singer, had much more allotted to him,

and did justice to all he sung. The remainder of the *principals*, to the amount of a dozen or more, may be passed over in silence. *Numerically*, no concert certainly was ever so well provided with vocalists. Those included in the list of *principals* are no less than *forty* (independent of five I have yet to name), and every one of them had at least one solo allotted to them. The largest number of first singers I can find in the list of the former concerts (and that only in one) is twenty; in 1784 they were not more than fifteen.

To this long list must be added the singers of the Italian opera, whom I have reserved to the last, not as a *bonne bouche*, but as a sort of *hors d'œuvres*, which might well have been spared, as they contributed little to the interest of the performances. These were Giulietta Grisi, Rubini, Ivanhoff, Zuchelli, and Tamburini; the first engaged for two of the days, the men for one only. They could have been engaged at all, only for the

sake of their names, which stand very high in their profession; but though excellent at the opera, they were ineffective in the Abbey, and it was known they would be so, as none of them were at all accustomed to sacred music, not even of their own church, or knew how to sing it, particularly the *prima donna*, who so entirely failed at her first rehearsal, it was feared she could not appear at the performance, but she improved a little. Of the men, Tamburini alone did well. How different this from the Italians of former days, who sung Handel's music to the utmost perfection! These could attempt only *masses*, and sung even those but indifferently; so entirely does the bad modern opera music unfit singers for every thing that is good.

It now only remains to give the *programmes* of the four concerts, with a few comments as well on the selections as the performance.

The festival commenced on Tuesday, June 24th, with the Coronation Anthem, "Zadoc the Priest," in compliment to the presence of

their Majesties. This was proper; but I have heard it performed with stronger and better effect. It was by no means so striking as it might have been, and it was remarked by many that this large band was not so loud as they expected. This very fine composition did not well introduce what was to follow, namely, Haydn's oratorio, "The Creation," which was given entire. The latter appeared tame and weak in comparison, though many parts of it are very beautiful, and some few of the chorusses extremely fine, almost emulating in sublimity those of Handel. The opening solo was performed by Mr. Bellamy; the ensuing chorus has been already noticed. The first air was sung by Mr. Vaughan, the next, "The marvellous Work," by Miss Stephens. It is a sweet composition, and she sang it extremely well. It introduces the charming chorus of "The Second Day." This was followed by an effective song by Mr. Phillips. The next piece is the air, preceded by a recitative, "With verdure clad," given by Madame

Caradori delightfully. This was decidedly the best solo performance of the whole concert, in which that excellent singer had nothing more to do. Nothing was allotted in this oratorio to Mr. Braham but a good recitative accompanied, preceding the noble chorus which concludes the first part, "The Heavens are telling the Glory of God," by far the finest of the whole. The beautiful little trio introduced which gives it such pleasing variety, was feebly sung, but the finale was very fine.

The second part of the concert comprised the second and third parts of the Creation, which are much shorter and very inferior to the first. It is unfortunate that this oratorio, beginning so well, should grow gradually weaker as it proceeds, the second not being equal to the first part, and the third the least good of all. I shall notice but few pieces in them. The part begun with a recitative and air by Madame Stockhausen, "On mighty pens the eagle wings." The song is a descriptive one, meant to express the notes of various

birds. Such imitations are generally more fanciful than exact, but it is pleasing, and Madame Stockhausen sung it well. The next two pieces deserving mention, both as compositions and for the manner in which they were executed, were the recitative, "And God said," and the air, "Now Heaven in fullest glory shone," and that immediately following, the recitative, "And God created man," with the air, "In native worth," the first sung by Mr. E. Seguin, the last by Mr. Sapio. Of these two singers I have given my opinion above, and can only again express my surprise and regret that they were heard no more.

The chorus concluding the second part of the Oratorio, "Atchieved is the glorious Work," and ending with "Hallelujah," is exceedingly good. And here it were to be wished the whole had ended. The account of the Creation is complete, and the third part, containing only some dialogues and duets by Adam and Eve, is a useless addition. Though

some of the melodies are very sweet, its prevailing character is languor and insipidity, without one spirited or enlivening piece to give it variety. Neither were any singers employed in it likely to remove those defects. The whole was flat, vapid, and unimpressive, I must therefore decline noticing it more particularly.

The third part of this day's performance was the best, consisting of selections from the oratorio of Samson. And here the superior force of Handel's sacred compositions was clearly manifested. It begun with the overture, the opening recitative, "This day a solemn feast to Dagon held," by Mr. Vaughan, and the spirited chorus, "Awake the trumpet's lofty sound." Then followed, with its recitative, the song, "Total eclipse," which has long been esteemed one of Mr. Braham's best performances. He sung it with his usual excellence. Next came (as it is placed in the Oratorio) the fine chorus, "O first-created beam." After some recitatives by various performers, Mr. Phillips sung with spirit the

song "Honour and arms;" but it is too long, and not a very pleasing one. A recitative was then introduced uselessly and inappropriately, as in the Oratorio it is connected neither with the piece that now preceded, nor with that which followed it. Neither had it any particular beauty to call for its insertion; still less was there any merit in the performance of it by one of the supernumeraries, who had nothing more to do. It would have been far better to omit it, and pass at once to the magnificent chorus, "Fix'd in His everlasting seat," which was very well performed. After some uninteresting recitatives, the Dead March in Saul was introduced, but failed of producing its usual effect, and excited no emotion, perhaps from being misplaced. As a strong, even too strong, a contrast to this, the air, "Let the bright Seraphim," almost immediately followed. This is one of the most brilliant and difficult of bravuras, trying to any voice, and absolutely *cruel* to the generality of singers, from the very high pas-

sages in it which few are capable of reaching; and when the performer seems to be painfully exerting herself in attempting their execution, the pleasure of the auditors is greatly diminished. Such, I am sorry to say, was the case on the present occasion. Miss Stephens, to whom the air was allotted, is no longer equal to it, and it appeared to be a task of labour and difficulty. At times she was but faintly heard, and was almost overpowered by the accompaniment of the trumpet. Under such circumstances, she should not have been required to undertake it. Now, indeed, Mara was sadly missed.

The only remaining piece was the chorus, "Let their celestial concerts all unite," which finished the day with éclat, for it was the most forcibly performed of any of the selection. For the first time I was almost carried back to the former celebrations, and reminded of the impressions they produced. It was a noble close. On the whole, this first concert occasioned considerable disappointment, and

is still reckoned the most feeble of the four: by some it was almost esteemed a *failure*. But whether from experience or greater confidence, or whatever else may be the cause, the performances improved as they went on, till they reached their greatest excellence in the Messiah.

The first part of the second concert was a miscellaneous selection, and a more incongruous medley was never put together, with very little to admire in it. It began with Handel's Coronation Anthem, "The King shall rejoice in thy strength," which is much inferior to the other, but was given from the same proper motive. Then followed an *Italian* song by Rubini; it was entitled *Davide penitente*, and probably belongs to one of those sacred operas acted in Italy in Lent, but certainly was never performed there in a church, whatever it may have been on the stage. This was a great stretch on the liberty granted to depart from the rule of singing only English words. For Latin there is the excuse that it

is the language of the Roman Catholic church, and that the words are always sacred, generally scriptural. But this was a mere *theatrical* song in a modern language, quite unfit to be introduced in so solemn a place. It would not have been known to be sacred but for the name of David prefixed, and the capital letters beginning some words. If printed without those distinctions it might be supposed to belong to any common serious opera. As a composition, though it was Mozart's, it had little beauty; and as to its execution, it was thoroughly insipid and ineffective. It was luckily the only interpolation of the sort.

The next pieces were from Beethoven's Judah (to English words), consisting of a chorus, a solo by Vaughan, a quartet by him and three inferior singers, and another chorus, but none of them were striking. These were followed by Handel's beautiful song, "Angels, ever bright and fair," excellently sung by Miss Stephens, who was perfectly equal to

its execution, and gave it with tender and pathetic expression. Then came a little of Haydn, extracted from his second *service*, as it was called, that is, *mass*, consisting of the "Kyrie eleyson," sung by Madame Stockhausen, Rubini, and Zuchelli, with a chorus. The latter then sang a solo with violoncello obligato, followed by another chorus. The first of these pieces was part of the Gloria, "Qui tollis peccata mundi," the last, the concluding words of the Credo, "Et vitam venturi sæculi," quite unmeaning without the preceding sentences, *nonsense* if conjoined to those which actually *did* precede them. In thus garbling, it should be one object at least to preserve some sense. We were then treated with English again; but of the two next pieces I wish not to speak. The first was an anthem by Sir John Stevenson, a very moderate composition, sung by Phillips, whose talents were thrown away upon it; the other a song of Handel's from Joshua, "Oh! who can tell," which deserved to be better sung.

These were followed by a piece of a very different character, simple, and solemn in the highest degree. This was Luther's Hymn, most incomparably sung by Braham. The organ accompaniment, and the chorus performed *sotto voce*, produced an effect most devotional and affecting. This hymn was first introduced to notice in this country by Catalani, who sung it at the York music-meeting, where it gave the greatest delight. She could not sing it better than Braham, but the nature of her voice might perhaps be better suited to it, though, being a mere psalm tune, fit for the common church service, any voice may sing it. Throughout the whole performance, nothing gave me greater pleasure than this natural unpretending air.

The remainder of this part was all Latin. First, a song of Haydn's, from his fifth *service*, by Grisi. This too was a disjointed sentence from the Gloria, "Quoniam tu solus," almost nonsense without the context. Of Grisi's performance enough has been said to

show it was extremely moderate: her attempt at a shake was miserable. The air was a kind of bravura, a style ill adapted to the words.

Next followed the whole Credo from Mozart's first service, of which the middle movement was a quartet, wherein Madame Stockhausen had a share.

This part ended with a solo by that lady, with a quartet and chorus, forming another garbled extract from the "Agnus Dei." None of these pieces were effective, or gave much satisfaction. This mangling system is not more favourable to the music than to the sense. It is disadvantageous to any composition to have a passage taken out here, another there, and not only separated from those that lead to and connect them, but tacked together irrelevantly and unmeaningly, so as not to form a uniform *whole* as they did in their proper place and order, but a mere *patch-work;* nor can a greater be conceived than was this first part of the concert.

The other two were a regular connected performance, for they consisted wholly of the Oratorio of Israel in Egypt, one of the finest and most scientific of Handel's compositions. It was performed entire at the former celebrations, by the express command of George the Third, exactly as it was written, and with the additional, or as it was said, the original name of Exodus. The whole oratorio was then taken from scripture. Now, poetry was introduced, some blank verse, some in rhyme, consisting of recitatives and solos, none belonging to the original, some, I believe, not even composed by Handel. These and many more interpolations had been made when the oratorio was performed, in three parts, at the ancient music, but were judiciously left out in the Abbey on His Majesty's discovering they made no part of the score. As not one of them was fine or well sung, it would have been much better again to omit them. The performance of the chorusses was exceedingly good; but as the other vocal parts were not

executed in a manner to call for any commendation, no mention shall be made of them, but I shall pass over to the end of the second part of the oratorio, and third of the concert. Then, and not till then, Braham and Miss Stephens, left silent too long, were again heard, but neither to the best advantage. He had to sing only the common recitatives between the parts of the chorus, "The Lord shall reign," which are generally given to a secondary singer, and she the short solo (between recitative and song) "Sing ye to the Lord," which again was rather beyond her present powers, and she did not give it with that force and electrifying effect which perhaps none but a Mara or a Catalani could impart to it. The very grand and most impressive chorus, "The horse and his rider," closed the day's performance. It will have been remarked how very little the best singers had to do in it, and that Caradori, who appeared in the list as engaged for every day, was not employed at all.

The third day's performance commenced with a hymn composed by Haydn in honour of the Emperor, and answering to our God save the King, but not for a moment to be compared to it for beauty or grandeur. It is however a soft and pleasing melody, consisting of alternate verses and chorus. It produced no great effect. The whole of the rest of this part was taken from Judas Maccabæus. The first piece selected was the chorus, "O Father, whose almighty power;" the second the air, "O liberty," with its introductory recitative. The violoncello accompaniment was of course well played by Mr. Lindley, but it was to be wished he had not finished his symphony with so long a cadence, not quite in accordance with the air. I would here by the way remark that not instrumental only, but vocal performers also are much too apt to indulge in the bad habit of tediously spinning out their cadences to an unreasonable length. In the latter especially, there cannot be a greater fault. When ca-

denzas ad libitum invariably closed every song, it was a positive rule to confine them, shake included, to one breath. A cadence *a due fiati* was by the Italians considered an undisputed mark of a bad singer. I counted no less than *four* respirations in one cadence, the deepest taken just before the shake, disjoining it from the passage of which it is the natural and expected close. The effect of this is indescribably bad. To compress these extemporaneous effusions into a short compass, and so to sustain and husband the breath as to effect it, requires more skill than all the lengthened desultory wanderings which are now sometimes heard. But I also have wandered too far into criticism. To return to the point whence I digressed. The song last noticed used to be sung by Mrs. Billington. I do not know whether it was composed for a soprano or a tenor voice: if the latter, it should have been allotted to a more forcible singer, for it was feebly performed. So were the three next pieces; a recitative by Vaughan;

a trio, " Disdainful of danger," sung in double choir by *six* men without one powerful or distinguished voice; three better gifted in that respect would have made more effect; and the duet and chorus, " Oh! never, never bow me down," not ill sung by two of the *fifteen*. At last we were roused from all this insipidity by Braham in the song, " Sound an alarm," a spirited air, which he gave with his usual energy. I shall make no further remarks on this part, except that the chorus, " See the conquering hero comes," so familiar to every ear that every body can at least make an attempt to *hum* it, was the worst performed of any throughout the festival. It was begun out of tune by the semi-chorus, and never got quite right. A martial march was then introduced, and the part ended with the chorus, " Sing unto God."

The second part was miscellaneous, and almost as great a medley as that noticed before, but there were finer pieces in it. It began with a Motet, by Mozart, in that sort

of Latin verse in doggerel rhyme, common in Roman Catholic services, but very offensive to English and classical ears. Tamburini led the opening of it, and there were other solos, ending in a chorus; but it was not striking. Next came an air, also of Mozart, sung by Grisi, beginning "Laudate Dominum," and ending with the Gloria Patri." She sung this better than that of the preceding day, and it was beautifully accompanied on the organ by Dr. Crotch. Then followed the beginning of a "Gloria in excelsis," by Pergolesi, in which two boys were introduced, choristers of the Chapel Royal and Abbey. They had sweet voices, but it was very injudicious to employ them, as there was no *want* certainly of sopranos. Boys can never sing really well; and though their clear *bell-like* tones have often a charming effect in the cathedral services, they are not sufficiently formed to be brought forward as principals on an occasion like this. Such exhibitions are like schoolboys reciting their lessons in public, a thing

not to be done except before select and partial audiences. We are now come to the best performance, not of this day only, but perhaps of the *whole;* the magnificent scene from Jephthah, " Deeper and deeper still," with the air, " Waft her, angels." I have already expressed my unqualified admiration of the manner in which Braham executed this difficult and empassioned recitative, requiring so much pathos and varied feeling: it is not too much to say, it was *perfect*, and this alone would establish his reputation as a first-rate singer. The air also was finely sung; but in the oratorio it does not come immediately after the recitative, which is followed by a chorus, concluding the first part; and the air is the first in the second part. Both are sung by Jephthah, but there seems to be a propriety in the interval between them, as they do not naturally belong to each other. The song in its proper place is preceded by a short recitative introducing it more appropriately. This scene was followed by that which suc-

ceeds it in the oratorio, the recitative, "Ye sacred priests," and air, "Farewell, ye limpid streams," performed by Miss Stephens, who was once more within her compass, and sung them with great sweetness; perhaps with not quite so much spirit as might be wished in the last lively movement, but on the whole very well. We now return to Latin. First, a double chorus by Leo, "Dixit Dominus Domino meo, sede *a dextris meis;*" next an air by Madame Stockhausen, stated to be from a Litany of Mozart's, but the words do not seem to belong to any such service, being those of praise and thanksgiving, not of prayer. Lastly, another air, said to be from another Litany by the same composer, but it is quite impossible this should be the case. The words are so extraordinary for the place where they were sung, I cannot help giving them at length. "Panis omnipotentiâ verbi caro factus in cruentum sacrificium cibus et conviva." This is not very elegant *latinity*, nor very easy to construe word for word: but its meaning may be given in a single one,

"TRANSUBSTANTIATION!" It was marked, *First performance in this country* (certainly it was, as Mozart did not live before the reformation), and it is to be hoped it may be the last. The reverend part of the audience, particularly the chapter of the church where it was to be heard, would surely not have permitted, had they been aware of it. They were, evidently, not consulted. The air in itself was nothing, and sung by Ivanhoff without the least effect. The remainder of this part was a selection from Beethoven's Oratorio, the Mount of Olives, in English, parts of which were very beautiful. It consisted of a recitative and air, by Caradori, with a chorus. It need not be said she sung it well. The rest were recitatives by Vaughan and Bellamy, and a trio, and final chorus.

The third part was shorter than the two preceding, but it was also the best, every piece being beautiful. The first was the least so; an anthem of Purcell's, consisting of a trio for three male voices, "Behold I bring you glad tidings," and chorus, "Glory to

God." Though a good composition, finer might be found in his works. Perhaps the comparison with Handel's setting of the same words, which could not but occur, might make it appear less fine that it really is. To this succeeded the air from Solomon, "What though I trace," by Mrs. W. Knyvett. It was this song, I believe, that first gained her reputation. Of course she is partial to it, and introduces it on every occasion. There appears to me to be a fault in her execution of it. She sings it too slow, thereby making it tedious. It is a soft, soothing melody, but not in the least degree melancholy, which it is rendered by her manner. It ought, on the contrary, to flow on in a smooth and easy strain, expressive of calm contentment. Storace sung it excellently at the former celebrations. Braham followed with a recitative from Joshua, "'Tis well," and the martial air and chorus, "Glory to God," a spirited composition, suited to his voice and style. The next piece was from an anthem by Pergolesi, "O Lord,

have mercy upon me," a most beautiful solo of two movements; the first highly pathetic; the second, "But my hope hath been in thee," cheerful and exhilarating. It was sung by Phillips with feeling and expression; but I did not think it well suited to his voice, as I had heard it sung by a contralto, which appears more appropriate for it than a bass. Yet no fault was to be found with his performance. This was succeeded by a very delightful piece of music, a sestetto from Haydn's first service. It was an extract from the Credo, beginning, as usual, abruptly with the words, "Et incarnatus est," and performed by Grisi, Ivanhoff, Tamburini, Madame Stockhausen, Miss Clara Novello (a very young girl with a clear good voice, the most promising of the scholars), and E. Seguin, who was of course but little heard in a concerted piece of so many voices. This was really beautiful, and perfectly well sung; as was a quartetto of Himmel, led by Tamburini, or rather, a song by him, the other voices being

quite subordinate. It has been already mentioned that this excellent singer was the most successful of the Italians; and it may be added that the last two pieces were the most successful that they sung. The very fine chorus of Handel, "From the censer," from Solomon, closed the concert of this day, with grand effect. On the whole, this pleased me best of all the miscellaneous selections.

The fourth and last concert was the most uniformly good, for it consisted solely of the Messiah, the chef-d'œuvre of Handel, and most sublime of his works, perhaps of every other work of the kind. It would be superfluous to speak of one so well known and familiar to all lovers of this species of music, and I shall not uselessly weary my readers by going through it in detail, but confine my observations to the principal pieces, chiefly as to the distribution of them, and their execution by those to whom they were allotted. I cannot but think the arrangement might have been better, and some of

the songs put into other hands with great advantage to their performance. The error complained of before, the little use made of the best singers, was more conspicuous on this day than on any of the preceding; the five principal only sung once. Braham opened the oratorio most excellently, but these were his last notes, he was heard no more. Caradori sung well "Rejoice greatly;" but though a brilliant song (and it was her only one), it did not show her talents to the best advantage. The recitative, "There were shepherds," was allotted to Mrs. W. Knyvett; the air "Come unto Him," to Madame Stockhausen; and "I know that my Redeemer liveth," to Miss Stephens, but she had nothing more. It is difficult to imagine why she had so little; she ought certainly to have delivered the recitative above mentioned, as she would have done so with greater excellence, though even she might have been inferior to Mara, whose distinctness of articulation, though a foreigner, surpassed

greatly that of the native who executed it. The last song named is much the finest in the oratorio, but, though well sung, the effect it produced was by no means equal to that described by Dr. Burney in the passage quoted above, nor was it to be expected; Miss Stephens never had as much expression as her great predecessor, nor could excite as much feeling in her hearers, but there appeared little diminution of her powers in this performance. There are in this oratorio no less than five songs and several recitatives for a bass voice, of which Phillips sung two, Bellamy one, and a new singer, named Machin, *two;* but E. Seguin, who would have been so useful and effective, was not allowed to have any. There are fewer for a tenor, but for one of them Sapio might advantageously have been employed. There being no good counter-tenor, the song "He was despised," which is generally given to that voice, was assigned to a female contralto, a Miss Masson, who sung it correctly, but

without feeling. As it is within the compass of a tenor, Harrison, Knyvett, and others, having sung it, Braham might have taken it, and would have given it all its deeply pathetic expression, which was totally lost. Miss Masson having just before sung "He shall feed his flock," a simple quiet air, more suited to her powers, need not have had this also allotted to her. On one of the former occasions it was executed to perfection by Rubinelli. Of the other solo parts it is unnecessary to speak: the songs of the Messiah are generally reckoned inferior to the chorusses, and many of them are always given to secondary singers. I have often lamented that one of them is so, because it gives languor and weakness to the close of the oratorio, the third part of which is all fine with the exception of the song, "If God be for us," which is exceedingly long and heavy. It signifies little by whom it is performed, but perhaps Mrs. W. Knyvett, her voice being sweeter, might have given it a better effect

than Mrs. Seguin, who sung it. This song immediately precedes the magnificent final chorus, "Wórthy is the Lamb," one of the most elaborate and scientific ever composed; too much so perhaps for unscientific hearers. The "Hallelujah" is not quite so intricate a composition, has more striking and startling passages, and is more generally popular. Both these unrivalled and inimitable productions, and indeed all the other chorusses, some of them yielding but little to these in grandeur, were extremely well performed; and on this department, *on this day*, the highest praise may be bestowed.

Thus ended this great Festival, which was so impatiently looked forward to, excited such great curiosity, and was attended by so many thousands. To the present generation it was an entire novelty, and the eagerness to go to it probably equalled that which was manifested half a century ago; but all who, like myself, are old enough to remember the former performances, decidedly give them the preference

over these; for though the instrumental part now was nearly as good as it could be, the choral appeared less strong, and in the principal vocal department there certainly was no comparison.

It must, however, be acknowledged to have been in many respects a fine performance: yet I cannot think it will be remembered or handed down to posterity with a reputation at all like that of the first, which after the lapse of very many years was never named without enthusiasm. The recollection of all who had been present at those performances brought them back so vividly to the imagination as to revive the feelings they had excited at the time. None could talk of them but with rapture, and the few survivors do so still. These are already spoken of, with a certain degree of approbation, it is true, but without any strong expressions of surprise or delight. The change of taste in music is so general, so total, that modern musicians do not now understand the ancient style, nor modern audiences appreciate

it so highly. That of Handel in particular is so much gone out of fashion that it was feared the performances would not have been so well attended if, as on the former occasion, they had consisted of his alone. On this account it was that so much of other composers was introduced. I cannot think the choice from them was always happy; much was dull, much insipid, and except in a very few instances, there was not any thing to be greatly admired, or make a strong impression. If even Haydn's chef-d'œuvre, the Creation, which is so beautiful in many of its parts, failed of making one, nothing else could. But all the other composers were overpowered by the gigantic strength of Handel, and they should have been kept apart. I have my doubts whether any foreign church music can ever be much relished in the country: it has not the solemnity of our own, and I should myself have greatly preferred services and anthems of our best old English composers, and there are many most excellent, to any

foreign introduction whatever. They would have coalesced so much better with each other, and with the *great master* (if I may venture to borrow the title of the *gran maestro* of Italy) that the *tout ensemble* would have been more of a piece, and more uniform sublimity preserved throughout. I say nothing of the obviously greater propriety of performing only *Protestant* church music in a Protestant church, and of the incongruity of *masses* being mixed up with it. Formerly such an intermixture would not have been permitted; but the liberality and toleration that prevail in the present times, give a latitude which would not have been extended to it then. It may be said that the Italian singers could sing nothing but Latin. (How well they *did* sing it has been noticed above.) In that case, I for one would willingly have dispensed with their services, for in this instance they were of little value, and they would not have been missed; but the foreigners employed before all sung English. Pacchie-

rotti indeed, understood and spoke the language well; Mara quite like a native. But not these only, Rubinelli, David, and others of inferior note, Tasca, Bartolini, were all taught to pronounce the words with tolerable correctness, and went through their parts extremely well. The same thing might have been done now if it had been worth while to take the trouble, which I confess it was not. Zuchelli is the only exception. He is half an Englishman, and could have performed well in English. When he first came back to this country, in which he was born and educated, Bartleman had lately died, and if he would have remained here, he might have succeeded him, but he preferred returning to France. Now it is said he is *gone off*, of which I am no judge, not having heard him for many years. Certain it is that he has been put into the back ground at the opera since the arrival of Tamburini, and that on the present occasion he had no opportunity afforded him of showing his talents to advantage.

To bring however these remarks to a conclusion, I do not expect that a repetition of this festival will be very eagerly desired; but should it ever be renewed, by the correction of a few defects, by *not* a few omissions, by a more tasteful selection, and more judicious arrangements, it might, under more favourable circumstances, be raised to the excellence of the former. It is not from the want of talent in the country so much as from the misapplication of it, that this was so inferior; for the musical celebrations at York are spoken of with the highest praise, and said to have been much more effective. Some who were present, and good judges too, went the length of saying, after hearing one of these concerts, that they would not go to a second, because *they had been at York.* Though the space there was larger, and the band perhaps not so large, all agree that it was finer, and its strength more powerfully called forth. Another celebration that took place last year at Norwich, though on a smaller scale, has also

been described as more complete in all its parts, and more perfect in its execution. By all accounts it seems that both were better managed, and gave greater satisfaction. It is true Catalani sung at the former place, Malibran at the latter, and one such brilliant leading voice is an incalculable advantage. With such an addition, and the experience that has been gained by this first experiment, there is no reason why future performances in Westminster Abbey should not equal, or surpass all imitation and competition.

There is one other point to which I cannot help adverting (though it may give offence in some quarters) of higher importance than all the rest, in which it is to be hoped the example of the last century will be better followed on any future occasion; and that is the appropriation of the profits derived from the performances. Then, as now, the Royal Society of Musicians, established for the support of aged and decayed professors, was considered as entitled to the first share in the gains.

When what was deemed a reasonable and sufficient proportion had been supplied to that fund, a very large sum, amounting to many thousands, was divided between St. George's and Westminster Hospitals, then labouring under distress, from which that timely assistance effectually relieved them. Those two most useful charitable institutions have lately been rebuilt, and still remain unfinished, by which their funds must have been impoverished, and undoubtedly a similar benefaction now would have been most acceptable to defray their expenses, and replace them on a stable footing. But neither those, nor any other hospital or charity whatever have been thought fit to participate in the very large surplus which it is understood has remained after all the expenses are paid, as well as the share to the Musical Fund. None but *musicians* are to be benefited by it. Other institutions for *them*, not to be justly included under the name of *charitable*, are to have equal portions with that which alone is

legitimately entitled to it; one of them in particular of questionable utility, interesting only to a few, and of no importance at all to the public, besides being extensively patronized, and sufficiently supported by other means. This distribution and these exclusions are very much to be regretted. Cavils were raised and objections started in high quarters against this festival as an irreverend desecration of the Abbey. The first would have been silenced, and the second removed by a strict adherence to the former precedent in this respect. Not a word could have been uttered to their prejudice had these sacred performances in a sacred place been devoted, as most assuredly they ought, solely to furthering the interests of charity.*

* I have been greatly assisted in writing this account of the Festival by much useful information received from William Ayrton, Esq., who obligingly lent me the book of performances in the Abbey in 1784, containing also other oratorios sung at the Ancient Music, left to him by his father, Dr. Ayrton, who was one of

Here I close these Reminiscences. It is impossible I should ever again have any temptation or opportunity to extend them farther. Perhaps I have already gone too far, and this last part might have been spared. But as this festival, coming home more closely, as it did, to my old recollections, greatly excited my almost extinguished curiosity, and revived the last spark of interest I shall ever take in music, I could not resist the desire to express the effect it had upon me, and my opinion as to its result. I may have done so

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the sub-committee at the commemoration, then an active, not a nominal post. The book was the more valuable from having belonged to Dr. Burney, who had made remarks in the margin. Mr. Ayrton also favoured me with a sight of the *libretti* of most of the operas produced in the few last seasons, from whence I gathered almost all I know. He had made marginal notes respecting the music, but not many very laudatory: as dramas, and as poetry, they are so bad, it is impossible to read them. How is the lyric drama fallen since the days of Metastasio!

too diffusely, and be accused of the garrulity of old age, as well as of its unbending prejudices in not giving more entire and unqualified approbation to the performances. But comparisons could not but arise in my mind between these and the original; thinking more highly of those that are gone casts no discredit on those that exist. I hope, therefore, I shall not be condemned as either too lukewarm or too severe. I have long been unfortunately circumstanced as to music. I cannot like all it is the fashion to admire, nor often hear what I admire myself. The very few operas I have heard of late years have either disappointed, wearied, or still worse, sent me away quite displeased, and dissatisfied; so that my indifference to going to the theatre is now turned into repugnance. I have therefore been much gratified by once more hearing what had given me such pleasure before; certainly more so than by any thing that can be heard elsewhere.

In conclusion I must say, as I did in my first page so also in my last, *first impressions are always the most lasting*, and mine have been indelible. With this excuse I take leave of my indulgent readers (if any have followed me so far) and finally bid them Farewell.

THE END.

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